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BOOK OF REVELATION
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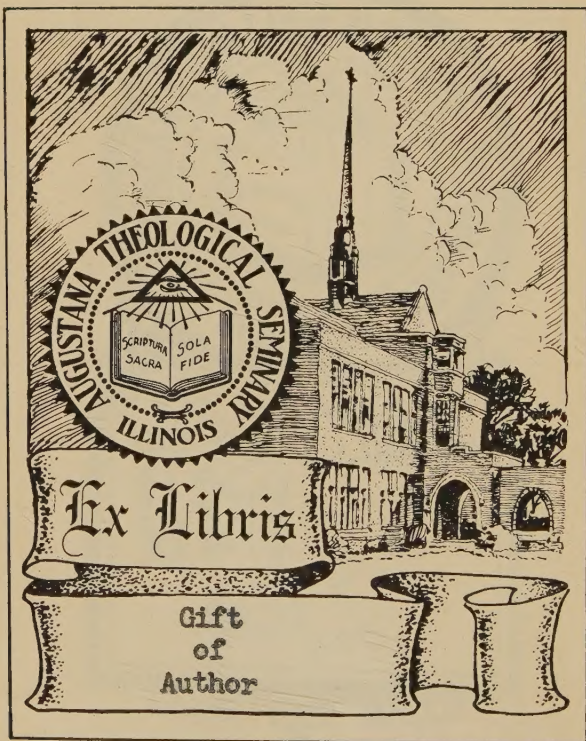
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The message of the Book of Revelation /



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**THE MESSAGE
OF
THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

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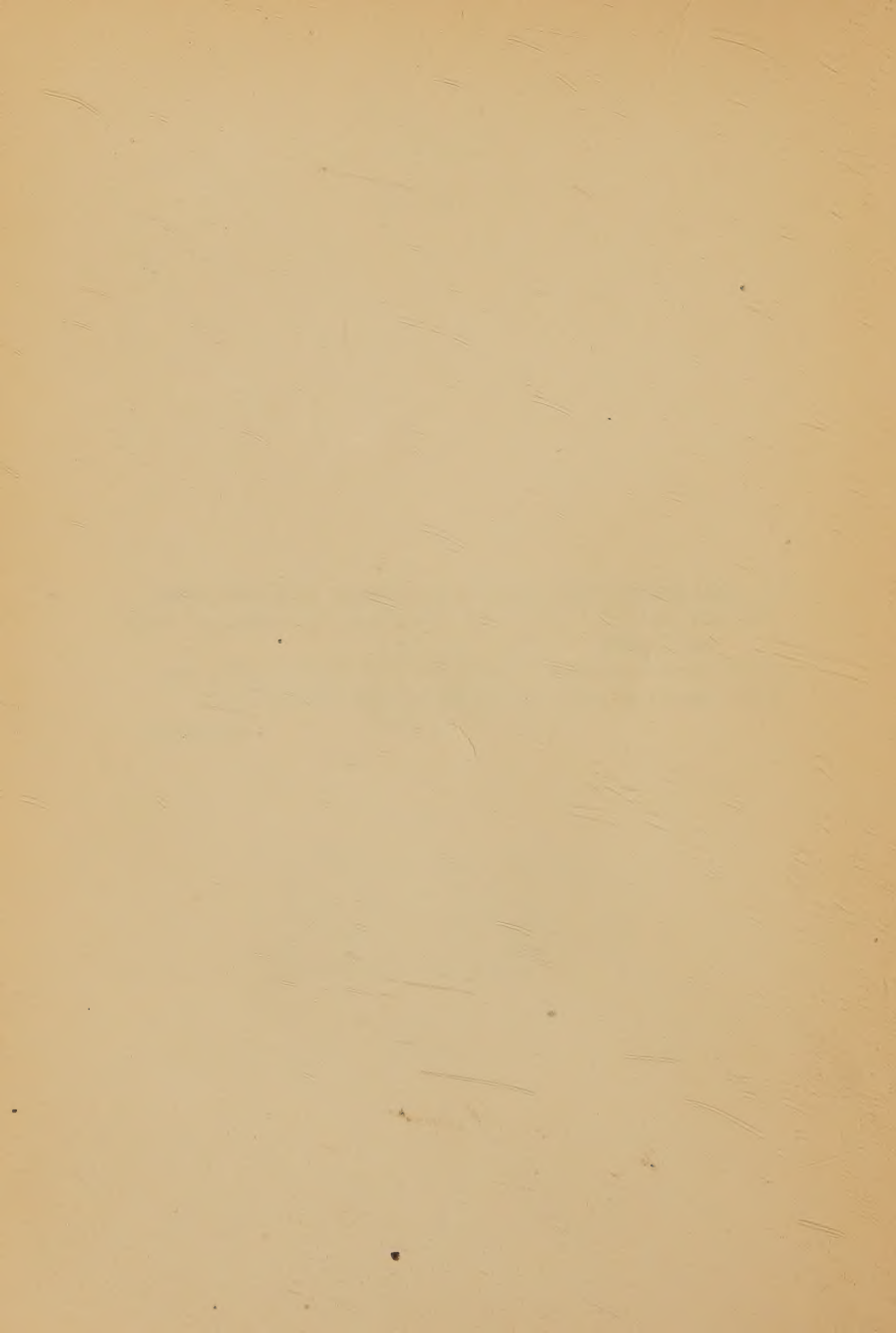
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*"O, what shining revelation of His treasures God hath given!
Precious things of grace and glory, precious things of earth
and heaven.*

*Holy Spirit, now unlock them with Thy mighty golden key,
Royal jewels of the Kingdom let us now adoring see!"*

—Havergal.



*To my wife who by her help and words
of encouragement made the writing of this
book possible, is this volume affectionately
dedicated.*

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INTRODUCTION

This treatise on Revelation seeks to point out the practical and wholesome lessons of the book rather than to enter into a critical study of its problems. It aims at a careful exposition of the message according to the best laws of interpretation. As the title indicates, this book should be a revelation, but to readers at large its truth is often hidden. The basic reason for this lies in the fact that many interpreters entertain speculative and fanciful ideas, growing out of the symbols and visions employed to express the thought. Great care is required in expounding the meaning of symbolical language. Every figure of speech has a main central truth, and only those details which amplify this main idea are to be interpreted.

The aim of
this volume.

It must be borne in mind, first of all, that Revelation is a letter sent to the churches of the Province of Asia, and that while it is composed of many symbols, it was intended to convey an intelligent message to the people to whom it was sent. Not only must we assume that the people were able to understand what the author was saying to them, but as well must we assume, that his message to them would apply to their needs, just as truly as did the letters of the apostles Paul and Peter to the needs of the people to whom they were addressed. And then, too, the general truth has necessarily an application to the church of all ages. There can be no doubt that the people to whom John wrote this letter would be more apt to understand its symbols than would those of later ages, who are out

Revelation
a practical
book.

Written to a
people under
stress and
strain of
martyrdom.

of touch with its exact circumstances. The epistle was written in a period during which the church was having a great struggle with Paganism. It is preëminently the martyr-book of the Bible. Martyr texts are woven into the very warp and woof of its material (1:9; 2:10, 13; 3:10; 6:3, 4, 9, 11; 7:14; 11:7; 12:13, 17; 13:7, 15; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:9). Above every people in the world, those who are under the stress and strain of severe persecution and martyrdom need a message that is plain and practical, rather than one that is hidden or vague in meaning. It would indeed be mockery to send to such a people a letter with no more message than this book brings to many people to-day.

Jewish and
Pagan per-
secutions.

There are in the history of the Christian church three distinct ages of persecution: the first of these was the age of Jewish persecution under which Christ and many of the early Christians suffered martyrdom; the record of this is found, in brief, in the gospels and in the Acts of the apostles. The second was the Pagan-Roman attempt to blot out Christianity, which was begun even before the Jewish persecution had ceased, as we notice in the ministry of Paul. The record of this persecution is found in the early church history, and no one will ever know how many thousands suffered and died in this dreadful siege. It covered a period of about two hundred and fifty years with varied degrees of severity from 60 A. D. until the conversion of Constantine the Emperor in 312 A. D.

Tolerant to
other religions
but not to
Christianity.

The Roman Empire was very religious; in fact religion was woven into every phase of life, commercial and civic, as well as domestic. It was also rather tol-

erant of the foreign religions of the world which were brought under its domain; so tolerant, indeed, that it built a temple called the Pantheon for the worship of all gods, a temple containing the shrines of the various leading gods of the nations. But this was true only of those religions which would yield to emperor-worship, current in Rome, and which would accommodate themselves to the various forms of heathenism. Christianity was so diametrically opposed to the Pagan spirit of the age: to its pomp, luxury, and military spirit; and above all to its idol-worship and emperor-worship, and the various immoralities associated with them, that it could not blend gracefully into the ideals of the state. In fact, Christianity was not content to be one among the rest of the current religions of the world. It was satisfied with nothing less than taking people out of their false religions and sinful habits, and transforming them into the image and glory of Christ, its own high ideal of life. Christianity never can be tolerant of that which is false or evil. Some of the very best Roman Emperors were the severest in their persecution of the Christians. This was due not so much to bad motives as to their own zeal for the welfare of the state. They plainly saw that Christianity would finally transform the entire government if allowed to grow unhindered. It was on this account that the Christians had to suffer the untold severities of that age.

Supreme ideal
of Christianity.

The third and last age of persecution is that which the church waged, largely against its members, for not conforming to its own formal rules and semi-heathen ideas of religion. Much of the severity that prevailed in the Pagan persecution passed immediately

Papal
persecution.

over with the state into the church and there took upon itself the garb of Christianity. While in the earlier period, the people were persecuted for becoming Christians and maintaining true standards of life, they were now persecuted either for not becoming Christians or for not conforming to all the set rules of the church. This grew finally into the Papal Inquisition, an institution of horror even as severe and heartless as were the activities of Nero against the church. The hallowed influence of the Reformation, alone, under the divine province of God, finally checked this deadly onslaught.

The awful
inquisition.

Date of
writing.

There is some difference of opinion as to the exact date of the writing of Revelation; some placing it under the reign of the tyrant Nero, about 65 A. D., others later under the reign of Domitian, about 96 A. D. It is in the latter period that the early church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Eusebius, Origen, and others place the book, and probably rightly so. All, however, agree that it was written during the age of the Pagan persecution. It is reasonable, therefore, that the author's treatment of the subject of persecutions would be called forth primarily by the conditions of the age in which the book was written, and would thus carry a practical application to the people to whom it was written. It is here that we find our most reasonable interpretation for the first beast in the record of chapter thirteen. This beast is a very appropriate symbol of the Pagan Roman Empire; and the age of persecution which immediately follows this, or in fact grows out of it as a logical sequence, is just as aptly represented by the second beast of chapter thirteen.

Without entering into a critical study of the authorship of this book, we will assume that its author was John the apostle, who, for a number of years, was the elder of the church at Ephesus, after the services of Paul and Timothy were ended. He was thoroughly acquainted with the condition of the churches to which he wrote, and was himself suffering with them in the persecution common to the age.

Authorship.

His purpose in writing was to make Christianity so real, so vital, and so full of hope that those to whom he wrote would be enabled to meet all the difficulties placed in their way and would be able to maintain their moral integrity at all hazards. His symbols and metaphors, on the one hand, strikingly illustrated the truth to the people to whom the message was sent; and on the other hand, kept it hidden from those who were the enemies of the church. Like the parables of Christ, they were a revelation to those who were open to the truth; but they hid the truth from those who would have used it as a salient power against the church (cf. Matt. 13:10-17). It is on this account that he called Rome Babylon, or that he called the Roman Empire a beast, etc., etc.

The purpose.

Since it is a book of visions, it is called an apocalypse, a revelation. Many of the symbols have much in common with the apocalyptic material of the Old Testament and the apocryphal Jewish literature, although none of these symbols are exactly like any of the others. They have sufficient resemblance, however, to make it exceedingly helpful, in fact essential, to compare them in study. A thorough review of that literature becomes invaluable to a careful study of Revelation. And then, too, the book uses a great deal

Relation to other literature.

of Old Testament material, not in direct quotation, but in appropriation of thought in the author's own peculiar style and diction.

Harmonizing
with the
gospel truth.

The author, having had a very intimate personal acquaintance with the Lord himself and having many years of experience in active Christian service, was certainly very well informed on the fundamental teachings of the gospel. He must have intended that all his various figures of speech should harmonize fully with the general truth of the gospel; or, in other words, gospel truth was the vital basis of his argument. Too often, however, in the interpretation of Revelation, this fact is ignored, and the exposition of these symbols, instead of vindicating the truth of the gospel, or at least harmonizing with it, is made to warp the plain gospel facts out of their true shape. It is very important, therefore, in our interpretation of this book, to keep constantly before us the great fundamental teachings of the New Testament, and so to interpret these figures as to fully harmonize with them.

Our
benediction.

It is our hope and prayer that this little volume may go forth under the sanction and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and may prove to be a stimulus for a more careful study, and for a deeper appreciation of the truth of the book of Revelation, that the life of everyone who reads this divine Apocalypse may be inspired to higher ideals of living, and to stronger service in the interests of the kingdom of God.

REVELATION

INTRODUCTION (Chapter 1:1-8)

The introduction to the book of Revelation falls naturally into two parts, the origin and purpose (v. 1-3), and the greeting (v. 4-8).

ORIGIN AND PURPOSE (1:1-3)

"The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him to show to his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare witness of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all the things that he saw.

The source and authorship.

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written herein: for the time is at hand" (1:1-3).

The motive for the study of the book.

This brief introductory statement plainly says that God is the original source and author of the book, and that he revealed it to Christ, who, through angel ministry, transmitted it to his servant John. It further states that John is a faithful witness of all that he saw.

During his earthly ministry Jesus frequently said that his teaching was not his own, but that it was given to him by the Father. **"My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from myself"** (John 7:16, 17; cf. 3:32, 35; 5:20, 26; 8:28; 12:49; 16:15; 17:2; Matt. 11:25, 26.)

God the ultimate source of Christ's messages.

Angel mediation given as the means of communication is again mentioned in the conclusion of the book (22:16); in fact no other book of the Bible so fully illustrates the revealing ministry of angels as this one does.

A book of
blessings for
the faithful.

Revelation is not a book of sealed mysteries for some remote, future age of the world; but it is practical and full of blessings for the people to whom it was written, and for the world at large. The frequent use of symbols in the book does not in the least destroy its practical value: for the Christians who were acquainted with the situation, these figures deepened the truth and made it more vivid; while on the other hand for their enemies they were insoluble mysteries.

SALUTATION (1:4-8)

The greeting
from Father,
Son, and
Holy Spirit.

"John to the seven churches that are in Asia; Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Doxology of
praise unto
Christ.

"Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion forever and forever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so. Amen.

The divine seal.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and is to come, the Almighty" (1:4-8).

This paragraph is divided into three parts, of which the first one is a greeting, the second a doxology, and the third a seal of divine approval.

The greeting (v. 4, 5a) reminds one of the greetings in the opening of the Pauline epistles (cf Gal. 1:3, 4; Eph. 1:2; etc.). John in the fervency of Christian love invokes grace and peace from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit upon the seven churches of Asia to which the letter is addressed.

Invocation.

The three persons of the Trinity are symbolically designated in this salutation. The clause, "**who is and who was and who is to come,**" refers unmistakably to God; it is an expanded form of the Old Testament term "**Jehovah,**" the "**I Am,**" (Exod, 3:14), the immanent, eternal God.

The Trinity symbolically designated.

The Holy Spirit is here designated the "**seven Spirits**" before the throne of God. The same term is again applied to the Spirit under different circumstances in chapter four, verse five and in chapter five, verse six. The numeral seven is very frequently used in this book and throughout the entire Bible as a symbol of fullness or perfection. The original ground of this symbolical use of the term seven is no doubt found in the creation week in the record of Genesis, chapters one and two. In its application to the Holy Spirit it evidently refers to the Spirit in its absolute fullness or completeness.

Seven, a symbol for fullness or completeness.

The author mentions Christ last in this greeting of the Trinity so as to blend harmoniously into the doxology which immediately follows. He represents him under the ordinary terminology of Jesus Christ, and then amplifies these terms by three clauses, revealing three distinct phases of his ministry: these are Christ

Fraught with blessing and comfort.

as a faithful witness, as the first born of the dead, and finally, as the Sovereign of the kings of the earth. Every phase of this heavenly greeting is fraught with blessing and comfort for a people who are struggling in the conflict with heathenism. It introduces the spiritual glow and warmth which continue to radiate throughout the entire book.

The message
of the book in
the doxology.

The doxology (v. 5b-7) is the first of a number of such songs of praise occurring in the apocalypse (cf. 4:11; 5:9, 10, 12, 13; 7:10, 11; 19:5-8). This hymn of praise bears, in brief, the message of the entire book; it is really the foreword or prologue of the book. Let us carefully notice the three important doctrines which it vindicates: first, Christ through love shed his blood to loose us from our sins; then, by virtue of this redemption, we are a kingdom or nation of priests unto our God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:8); and then, finally, in the climax of this benediction we are confidently assured that Christ will come back again to consummate the interests of his kingdom. These are the three cardinal phases of the kingdom of God, the inception, the perpetuation, and the conclusion.

The Alpha and
the Omega.

The greeting and the doxology are then, in verse eight, immediately followed by a brief, solemn ascription to God, the eternal Sovereign. This seems to be the very seal of heaven set in approval to this foreword of the book. The words Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, like the first and last letters of the Hebrew, were often used to express fullness or totality. As applied to God this designation means the Absolute, Almighty God, the Father of the universe (cf. Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12).

LETTERS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

(1:9-3:22)

This first general section of the apocalypse divides naturally into two parts: the commission and vision (1:9-20), and the letters to the seven churches respectively (2:1-3:22).

Two divisions.

JOHN'S COMMISSION AND VISION (1:9-20)

This paragraph, for convenience in study, is divided into three parts: the commission (vs. 9-11), the vision of Christ (vs. 12-16), and the commission repeated and emphasized under the light of the vision (vs. 17-20).

Three divisions.

The Commission (1:9-11)

"I, John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea" (1:9-11).

The occasion.

Patmos is a small, crescent-shaped, rocky island six miles wide and ten miles long, located in the Ægean sea, along the western shore of Asia Minor about forty miles southwest of Miletus. According to the unanimous tradition of the early church, John the revelator, instead of being killed as a martyr, was for a season confined to the solitudes of this island for being a faithful witness in the Master's cause. It is under these circumstances that he was a partaker with

A message from prison.

Prison
messages are
warm with
sympathy.

his people in the tribulations they endured, and that he could really enter into sympathetic touch with them. The messages of the book are wrought under such experiences and are warm in sympathy.

A Lord's day
experience.

John was in the Spirit, that is, he was in a state of spiritual ecstasy or trance, similar to the experience of Daniel (cf. Dan. 10:1-12) and the frequent experiences of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2; 3:24; 8:3; 11:24; 37:1; 43:5). This vision took place on the Lord's day or Sunday. This day was so called because it was the resurrection day of our Lord, the first day of the week. This term was very commonly applied by the early church to the Christian's Sabbath, or Sunday.

An urgent
commission.

The vision is introduced by a great trumpet-voice, sternly giving commission that the revelation shall be recorded. The voice is authoritative, and therefore the demand is urgent. Not only is the vision to be recorded, but is to be sent to the seven churches which are here designated. The order in which these are named, and in which they appear in the following chapters, is the order in which they are located on the Roman road, as a footman would carry the letters to them, beginning at Ephesus.

The realistic
sense of these
letters.

According to the history of the early church, John the apostle was for a number of years the elder or overseer of the church at Ephesus, some time after Paul and Timothy had completed their labors in this important church center. It is probably on this account that he addressed this church first in his series of letters. The oversight of the church afforded John a splendid opportunity to become acquainted with this church and the neighboring churches to which he wrote, just as Paul was acquainted with the churches

to which he wrote his letters. We must continually bear in mind that the messages of the apocalypse are just as real and just as applicable to the people to whom they were written as were any of the other epistles of the New Testament. The general truth they express is, of course, applicable to the church of all ages. There is, however, a sense in which these seven churches symbolically represent the entire church of Christendom, not in any dispensational sense, but in a general sense. This is evident from the fact that John selects seven out of the ten or more churches of the Province of Asia; seven being a perfect number and representing completeness.

The Vision (1:12-16)

“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (1:12-16).

Christ among
the churches.

The first thing in this vision that comes to the writer's view is the seven golden lamps or candelabra, which, as he says (v. 20), represent the seven churches to which he is to write. That, however, to which his whole attention is immediately directed, is the august

Christ
absorbing
his whole
attention.

Personage standing in the midst of these lamps. This is unmistakably the glorified Christ. It is not an ordinary picture or what we might term a photograph of the ascended Christ but it represents him under the light of powerful symbols, which are essential in giving an adequate concept of him in his divine glory and heavenly splendor.

Heavenly
power
manifested by
earthly
symbols.

His apparel indicates high official service, both along royal and priestly lines: his outer garment was a long royal robe, his girdle was golden, emblematic both of strength and righteousness (cf. Isa. 11:5; 22:21; Dan. 10:5); his hair was exceedingly white, like that of the "Ancient of days" representing God in Daniel's theophany (cf. Dan. 7:9), indicating profound wisdom. His eyes were like flames of fire, signifying great discerning power; his feet shone in the splendor of highly burnished brass, emblematic of his stability and executive power (cf. Dan. 10:6; Ezek. 1:7); the deep volume of his voice enabled him to express himself in tones of final authority. In the dexterity and strength of his right hand, he controlled the seven stars or angels of the churches; the only weapon of his holy warfare was the two-edged sword of his mouth, which is the word of God. (cf. Heb. 4:12; Rev. 2:12-16; 19:15, 21; Eph. 6:12, 17; 2 Cor. 10:4, 5). In his holiness and divine majesty, his countenance shone in the splendor of the sun (cf. Matt. 17:2; Acts 26:13).

The all-
sufficient,
immanent
Christ
manifest in
the power of
the Holy Spirit.

The powers of Christ were by these symbolical exponents raised to a high degree of their strength and splendor, so that John and those to whom he was writing might be able to appreciate the invisible spiritual power of the immanent Christ, who, being personally absent, is yet in the power of the Holy Spirit

present, and abundantly adequate to meet all the various needs of his people. As we shall see when we study the letters, these symbols are incorporated into the address of the letters respectively, in harmony with the peculiar needs of the churches: thus to the church at Thyatira he says, "These things saith the Son of God, who hath eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass" (2:18). And to the church at Pergamum he says, "These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword" (2:12), etc., etc. This vision in its application to the needs of these churches furnishes us with one of the rarest representations of the immanent or omnipresent Lord that we have anywhere on record.

The Commission Repeated and Emphasized (1:17-20)

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

The same sympathetic touch of his earthly ministry.

"Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks are seven churches" (1:17-20).

The sublime and overwhelming glory of this vision brought John into a collapse, as Saul of Tarsus was brought to the ground in his vision of Christ in the Syrian desert (cf. Acts 26:12-18), and as the prophets were overawed and overpowered in their theophanies

The power of overwhelming glory.

(Isa. 6:4, 5; Hab. 3:16; Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 8:17; 10:7). The ever-welcome "**Fear not**" and the sympathetic touch so common in Christ's ministry had not diminished in his heavenly glory, for, no sooner had he laid his right hand upon John saying, "**Fear not,**" and identified himself as the risen Lord, no sooner had he done that than John was ready again to listen to the commission which had already been given him. There is no doubt that John, after having had this remarkable vision, could enter into the spirit of this commission with added grace. Only those who have an adequate vision of Christ and his power to save are ready to receive a commission for his service. It was when Jesus had overawed his disciples with the miraculous draft of fishes that he said, "**Follow me and I will make you fishers of men**" (cf. Luke 5:1-11).

The angel of
the church.

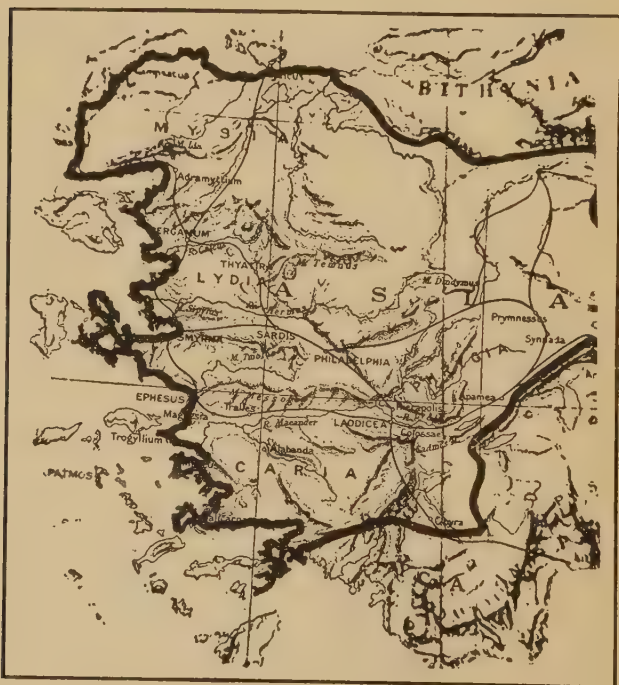
In close connection with this commission Jesus gives the interpretation of two of the prominent symbols of this vision: the seven stars, he says, are the seven angels of the churches, and the seven candelabra are the seven churches. But even with this interpretation of the seven stars there is considerable difference of opinion among Bible scholars as to what is meant by the "**angel**" of the churches. The Greek word for "**angel**" means messenger, and is sometimes applied to men, but more commonly to angels. In the New Testament it is nearly always applied to angels: out of the one hundred and eighty-five uses of the term, seven only, are applied to men (cf. Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24; 7:27; 9:52; 2 Cor. 12:7; James 2:25). It occurs seventy-six times in the apocalypse and is there always applied to angels; either literally or symbolically. In this immediate connection its use

makes it so nearly identical with the church itself, as we shall see in the addresses of the various letters that it seems to be a symbol of the church, and if it is, then probably the terms “star” and “angel” would represent the church from the heavenly standpoint just as the lamp does from the earthly standpoint.

The golden lamp is, indeed, a very striking symbol of the church. It should not be called a candlestick for candlesticks were not known in that age of the world. It is more than likely that the golden seven branched lamp of the tabernacle, or the ten golden lamps in the holy place of the temple gave the revelator a general background for this vision. The only light the sacred apartments of these sanctuaries had was the light from these lamps. The priests were instructed to fill and trim them and keep them burning brightly (Exod. 27:20, 21; Lev. 24:2-4). It is possible also that the golden lamp in the vision of Zechariah may have had its influence in this vision (Zech. 4:1-7). The prophet there saw a golden seven-branched lamp standing between two olive trees, so connected with these trees as to be spontaneously supplied with oil, without priestly intervention. This vision of the prophet is one of the strongest symbolic illustrations in the Bible on the adequacy of a Spirit-filled life. When the church has a membership fully under the control of the power of the Holy Spirit she fulfills her mission of light-giving and is truly as her Master was, “the light of the world.” Christ said to his disciples, “Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light

The golden lamp a striking symbol of the church.

shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).



Province of Asia

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS (2:1-7)

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks:

A church of untiring effort, but needing more love.

"I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary.

"But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember, therefore, whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.

"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (2:1-7).

Ephesus was one of the leading cities of the world and a most prominent center of Pagan religion. It was here that Paul founded the mother church of the Province of Asia (Acts 19:1-41). Some of the early struggles of this church, and the supreme efforts of the Apostle Paul in founding it, are given in his closing farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, a part of which we here insert. He says, "Ye yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, after what manner I was with you all the time, serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears, and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews;

A leading city, in the Pagan religion.

What it took to build up the church.

how I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord J  sus Christ.

A strong
warning to the
church officials.

“Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears. And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified” (Acts 20:18-21, 28-32).

This address of the apostle Paul gives us some idea as to what struggles this church and the surrounding churches had, and as to what effort it took to build up a church, and to keep it growing in such a wicked environment. The message in Revelation was given to these churches thirty-five or forty years later than this, and suggests that some of the same problems still existed.

Strong against
the intrusion
of false
apostles.

John first of all brings to the church a strong commendation for its endurance and patience, and for its positive attitude against the intrusion of false apostles. One of the most serious problems the early church had to meet was the menace of false apostles; these were in the main, Judaizing teachers, who on the one

hand, opposed the spirituality of the church, so strongly taught by the apostle Paul; and who on the other hand, attempted to impose upon the Christian church the rituals of the Old Testament and the Pharisæic traditions. The book of Galatians was written to warn the churches of Galatia against this imposition. The church at Ephesus, as we see in this letter, was faithful in this respect and he commends them for it. They were also faithful in opposing the Nicolaitans. Sensitive to sin. Who the Nicolaitans were and what the nature of their sin was, we do not know; there are some traditions concerning them, in the early church, but there is nothing that is very reliable. It is probable that they were a divergent sect springing up in the midst of the church. The church at Pergamum had trouble with them also (2:15).

While on the one hand, the church was commended Love dying out. for withstanding the false apostles and being sensitive to the sin of the Nicolaitans, on the other hand, she is severely rebuked for having left the fervent love of her earlier days. The burning zeal kindled by the love of the Saviour had grown cold. The apostle Paul had prayed very earnestly that this love might continue to grow and deepen into the fullness of Christ's love. In his letter to this church he says, "I bow my knees unto the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height

Paul pleading for a Christ-like love.

and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:14-19). Love, the prime motive of Christian life, so supremely essential to Christian growth, and so much in evidence in this church in the days of Paul, was now gradually dying out and was leaving the church in a precarious condition. The Saviour comes to her, therefore, with a severe rebuke and a strong exhortation to repentance lest he should be compelled to bring judgment upon her.

An earnest
personal appeal
for each
individual of
the church.

Near the close of this letter, and in each one of the others that follow, there is a very urgent personal appeal to every individual member of the church. This appeal is put into one of the most common, and most telling proverbs of the New Testament: "**He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.**" This warm entreaty, with a little variation, is one of the characteristic appeals of our Lord during his earthly ministry (cf. Matt. 11:15; 13:43; Mark 4:23; Luke 14:35). It is based on the ground that those who have the word of God are responsible for living up to its teaching. It makes the truth of these messages applicable to everyone that hears it, and it lies in the wake of the blessing promised in the opening verses of this book: "**Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand.**"

Eating in
Paradise.

To those who respond to this personal appeal and who faithfully overcome the temptations and trials of life, he gives a rich promise of future inheritance. In this letter he puts that promise into the form of a symbol taken from the garden of Eden: he says, "**To**

him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God."

In a brief review we notice then that this letter contains a warm commendation, a severe rebuke, a strong appeal, and a rich promise. While it is written to the church at Ephesus, it is none the less practical for the church in general in any age of Christendom where conditions are similar.

A practical message.

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA (2:8-11)

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again.

"I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Poor and yet rich.
Persecuted and yet faithful.

"Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (2:8-11).

Smyrna, mentioned only twice in the Bible, is the only one of these seven cities which still exists in a flourishing condition. It is situated on the Roman highway about fifty miles north of Ephesus along the seacoast. Both Smyrna and Ephesus were in those days important commercial centers, but to-day Ephesus is a heap of ruins and Smyrna carries the trade of both cities. It contained, in the days of the revelator,

Smyrna still exists.

a strong Jewish settlement, and was also an important Christian center. Polycarp, one of the prominent church fathers, was for a number of years the overseer of this church and died here, in 155 A. D., a martyr to the cause of Christ.

How
sympathetically
Christ can help
everyone who is
suffering!

Christ comes to this faithful, persecuted church with a cheering word of comfort. He who had himself died on the cross, but now lives, could well bring a message of comfort to those who are persecuted. He who had himself felt the pangs of poverty could strike a sympathetic chord in the lives of those who were poor. And he who was himself rich in spiritual things could adequately appreciate the spirituality of the church at Smyrna. To know that he knows is an important factor toward being forearmed for the severe struggles in life. Well indeed, could he say, "**Fear not.**"

Persecuted
by Jew and
Gentile.

He charges the Jews with blasphemy, and for maintaining a synagogue of Satan. We know from secular history that the Jews living at Smyrna were in sympathy with the persecution which the Roman authorities were waging against the Christians. It is probably on this account that he calls them the "**synagogue of Satan.**" The term "**ten days**" as the duration of their persecution is somewhat indefinite. It is a symbolic number which was probably originally taken from the ten days' testing of Daniel and his comrades (cf. Dan. 1:12, 18) and indicates a full, complete test.

A crown for
the martyr.

Not only does he bring comfort and encouragement to this church, but knowing the stress and strain of life under such circumstances, he exhorts them to be faithful, even unto death; and he assures them that, even though death may be their lot, yet the crown of life awaits them (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-8). After making the

characteristic personal appeal he extends to them a hopeful promise. This promise is that those who are faithful are immune from the "second death"; though it may be their lot to give their lives in sacrifice for the cause they have espoused, the horrors of the second death cannot touch them (cf. 20:14).

"So, patiently, I strive to stand and wait
Thro' all the glories of the fading years;
Wait till His hand shall lead me thro' the gate,
And change my sighs to songs, to smiles my tears."

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM

(2:12-17)

"And to the Angel of the church in Pergamum write: These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword:

"I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth.

A dangerous dwelling-place.

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner.

Treacherous Balaam.

"Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give

A divine secret.

him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it" (2:12-17).

A place
prominent in
Caesar-worship.

Pergamum was an important city situated about as far north of Smyrna as Smyrna was north of Ephesus, but about twelve or fifteen miles from the seacoast. It was one of the main centers of heathen worship and was especially noted for its emperor-worship. It was also an important educational center. A library of two hundred thousand volumes was sent from this place to be used in building up the library of Alexandria in Egypt.

Christ comes to this church armed with the sharp two-edged sword. He recognizes the fact that they are dwelling near the throne of Satan, a very dangerous place indeed; and commends them for holding fast to their religion even in the face of persecution and martyrdom. He mentions the fact that Antipas had been killed in their midst. Who this man was, we do not know. The whole matter must have been well known to them.

The leaven of
evil with its
contaminating
influence.

This church, faithful as it was under the test of persecution, had allowed the sensuality of the Pagan rites of its environment to get a foothold in her midst. He compares the gravity of the situation to the awful tragedy which Balaam had brought upon Israel, when even after having blessed them, he enticed them into the sensual worship of Baal-peor (cf. Num. 25:1-9; Deut. 23:4, 5; 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11). The sin of the Nicolaitans which was mentioned in the previous letter was also gnawing away at the vitality of this church. He holds the church strictly responsible for entertaining such adverse influences. He says, "**Repent ye**

therefore or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against thee with the sword of my mouth."

The responsibility of the church.

The word of God is a sharp pruning knife by which the evil and the offending elements of the church are to be removed lest the church itself be destroyed.

Again he makes the usual personal appeal for loyalty to the Spirit's teaching and gives ample assurance that he will reward him that overcometh. The promise is in this case given in the symbol of a white stone bearing a new name known to him alone who receives the stone. It is difficult for us to know exactly what he means by the form of this symbol although the people to whom he wrote this letter no doubt understood it perfectly. It seems to be a means of identification as a passport into realms of glory.

Faithfulness a positive guarantee to eternal life.

This church, like the church at Smyrna, was proving faithful under the severe test of persecution from the combined forces of evil but she was gradually allowing the influences of heathen worship to contaminate her: she was apparently too tolerant of the sin that was in her midst. Paul had spoken very emphatically on the danger of such tolerance in his letter to the church at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13), and this warning they no doubt had at Pergamum and should have heeded.

Too tolerant of sin.

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA

(2:18-29)

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet like unto burnished brass:

"I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first,

Strong commendation.

"But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time that she would repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. Behold, I cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.

The treacherous
Jezebel spirit.

"But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who know not the deep things of Satan, as they are wont to say; I cast upon you none other burden. Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come.

"And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received of my Father: and I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (2:18-29).

Thyatira, situated forty miles southeast of Pergamum on the Roman road leading on through Sardis, was a prosperous city engaged largely in the manufacture of purple dyestuff used for dyeing the clothing (cf. Acts 16:14, 15). Christ recognizes a healthful growth in this church. In their love and faith and ministry and patience, they have made commendable advance. There is, in fact, a sharp contrast between the condition of this church and that of Ephesus. In-

Those who
serve as
Christ did will
reign as
Christ does.

A church
growing in
grace.

stead of losing her first love, she has at least made some gain.

Notwithstanding the fact that the church was growing in grace, she was yet too lenient with sin. Idolatry was gradually encroaching upon her. So serious was this that he likens it to the awful intrusion of the Baal cult into Israel in the days of the wicked Jezebel. His searching eyes penetrated into the so-called deep things of Satan so that he could justly bring judgment against this state of affairs. Sensuality in one form or another has been a common accompaniment of the heathen religions in all the ages of the world; and it was one of the sins which gave the early church in her conflict with heathenism most serious trouble. It is here again condemned in most emphatic terms and the church is warned against being too lenient with it.

It is dangerous to be too lenient in morals.

To those who were faithful and were in a healthy growing condition, he gives a very rich promise. He assures them that he will make them joint heirs with himself in the lordship of his kingdom, or as Paul says, "Even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21).

The needs of the faithful are never overlooked by the Lord.

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS (3:1-6)

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.

A name is not enough.

"Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and

An exhortation to watchfulness.

keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

A few faithful ones remembered.

"But thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (3:1-6).

A bad atmosphere.

Sardis was about thirty-five miles south of Thyatira, and was formerly the prosperous capital of Lydia. Its population was notorious in "luxury and licentiousness, and it is evident that the Christian community there had a hard struggle to resist the insidious atmosphere by which it was surrounded."

Hypocrisy condemned.

To this church, dying and almost dead as it was, Christ came in the emblem of power and final authority. The usual commendation given at the beginning of these letters, is in this case entirely wanting. Their condition must have been indeed quite serious or this commendation would not have been omitted. He at once proceeds to put them under a severe charge of hypocrisy, of pretending to live and yet being dead. In Christ's ministry as recorded in the gospels no sin was more severely condemned than hypocrisy (cf. Matt. 23). While on the one hand he lays this charge against them, on the other hand he makes an urgent appeal for repentance, lest he should be compelled to bring them to judgment.

A faithful few.

To the few who in the face of their environment were still faithful he has, as always, words of comfort

and encouragement. To them he promises white robes for not having defiled their garments with the sin of their associates. To each one he brings the appeal, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA
(3:7-13)

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth:

"I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. A faithful church.

"Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

"Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. To the faithful help is assured.

"I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown. He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (3:7-13). A timely exhortation.

The city of
brotherly love.

Philadelphia was a city situated in a volcanic district on the Roman road leading from Sardis to Laodicea. Its name is derived from two Greek words meaning brotherly love and the town is now called the city of God. The Lord comes to this church with the key of David. Carrying a key in the Orient is a symbol of authority and ownership. The figure in this case is probably taken from a promise given to Eliakim which reads thus, "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Isa. 22:22).

The door of
opportunity
open to the
faithful.

He finds Philadelphia to be a faithful church. He has no rebuke to bring to her; but he commends her for being faithful to the word of God and having at least a little power. He sets before her an open door of opportunity which none can close and exhorts her to be patient and faithful in the trials that are before her and promises to give her strength to overcome in the time of testing. He promises to make him that overcometh a pillar in the temple of God and promises to give him the seal of God's own name. Then also, to each individual of this church he makes the personal appeal and says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

A LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA (3:14-22)

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God:

Lukewarm.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou were cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of the nakedness be not made manifest; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see.

A worldly church.

Spiritual poverty.

"As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

A patient, loving, pleading Christ.

"He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (3:14-22).

Laodicea was situated in the neighborhood of Colossæ and Hierapolis directly east of Ephesus on the great highway running from Ephesus to the Euphrates. Paul wrote a letter to this church at the same time he wrote one to Colossæ but it was never canonized in the New Testament (cf. Col. 4:16).

A letter not canonized.

The Lord found this church careless and self-righteous, boasting of its goodness but being really wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. To this church then, he necessarily comes with an "Amen" of profound conviction of the truth. He makes an urgent appeal for a thorough repentance, and reminds them that the chastenings of love ought to win them, and open their hearts to the blessed hope of divine fellow-

A burning message.

The Saviour
gently
knocking.

ship. He stands at the door of the heart and knocks and patiently waits for a response from this careless, worldly church. He offers a rich promise to every individual that overcomes, and promises to make him a joint heir with himself in the glory of his Father. And again he makes the appeal, "**He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.**"

THE GENERAL IMPORT OF THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

In brief review we can say that he commended the church at Ephesus for patiently toiling on in its Christian service and for opposing the false apostles that attempted to intrude upon them. He commended the church at Smyrna for being rich in spiritual life even though it was poor in finance; and the churches at Pergamum and at Philadelphia for being faithful in times of persecution. Fortunately the church at Thyatira was growing in grace and becoming richer in spiritual life day by day, and for this he very strongly commended her. Sardis, however, and Laodicea he did not commend at all, for these churches which were almost dead needed rebuke rather than commendation.

Where commendation is possible.

The church at Ephesus he rebukes for leaving its first love and having lost its early zeal. And Laodicea he rebukes for being lukewarm and in serious danger of being rejected. Pergamum and Thyatira he rebukes severely for tolerating contaminating influences of idolatry and sensuality in their midst. But Sardis he rebukes severely for pretending to live, yet being dead. Smyrna and Philadelphia he does not rebuke at all; these two churches had been so faithful as to merit only commendation in direct contrast to Sardis and Laodicea.

Where rebuke is necessary.

Where rebuke is not necessary.

He exhorts all the churches: those on the one hand which were yielding to sin, like Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis, and Laodicea, he exhorts to repentance; but those on the other hand which were struggling under persecution, like Smyrna, Thyatira, and Philadelphia, he strongly exhorts to be faithful and to be true to the trust given into their hands. To every individual in

Where exhortation is wholesome.

all of these churches he makes a strong appeal to live up to his opportunities, in saying, "**He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.**"

To him that
overcomes.

To each one who overcomes he gives a rich promise in the future life. These promises are all given in the form of symbols some of which may be vague to us but all of which must have been understood by the people to whom these letters were written. The promises were given, however, to those alone who were faithful.

Both actual
and symbolical.

The various conditions of the churches here mentioned were historically true and their needs were real and urgent. These letters are in no sense of the word fictitious or mystical. They were meant to meet the actual needs of the churches to which they were sent. All the conditions peculiar to these churches were actually existing in the small Province of Asia when they were written and have no doubt repeated themselves many times since then in the history of the church. Whenever and wherever they repeat themselves these messages become applicable and practical. In a general way the seven churches are, no doubt, symbolical of Christendom at large, but there is no hint anywhere that they are dispensational, or in other words that conditions in the various churches here point out distinct church ages. They carry the same general value to the church at large that the Pauline epistles do.

Strongly
unique.

These letters are unique, however, from all other New Testament writings in that they lay a new emphasis upon the idea of an immanent Christ. The human element seems to drop so completely out of their authorship that instead of Paul or Peter or someone else writing to them, Christ seems to be standing

in their midst giving them the message they need. In fact, he walks among the churches, and applies himself to every individual of each church. This gives to the letters a vividness and a power that is entirely unique. Not only is Christ in their midst, but he is in their midst in the strength of the great symbols mentioned in the vision of the first chapter: his eyes like flaming fire see everything and his voice speaks in tones of final authority.

Before Christ left the world he very carefully instructed his disciples that although he would be absent from them personally he would be with them in the power of the Spirit: he said, "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you. Yet a little while and the world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me: because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:18, 19). And again he said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). The fact of an immanent or ever-present Saviour, under the direct administrative power of the Holy Spirit, is far too little recognized or appreciated. We are apt to think of God and Christ as being far away in some remote corner of the universe. These letters give to us the most vivid and most vital expression of the spiritual presence and power of the glorified Christ that we have anywhere on record.

The immanent
Christ.

Christ in this spiritual sense walks among the churches in every land, and in every age, and under the power of the symbols of the vision of chapter one, he applies himself directly to the various conditions and needs of each church and individual. He brings encouragement and commendation with all their uplifting influences wherever it is possible to do so; he

Applicable to
every age.

instructs whenever instruction is the vital need, and indeed no one can ever grow too wise in the school of Christ. He rebukes and warns where sin is allowed to lurk. He comforts in the deepest sympathy, where trials and persecutions are severe, and he brings promises which are rich and rare to all who faithfully overcome, in the struggles of Christian life and service. He comes to each individual under all the varied circumstances of life, and pleadingly, lovingly, and earnestly he says, **"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."** The more we recognize the fact that we have an immanent Saviour who is abundantly willing and able to meet every need in life, the more will our Christianity become real and vital factors in the kingdom of God.

OPENING THE SEALED BOOK

(Chapters 4-11)

This general division of the apocalypse is a record of the opening of the seven seals of the sealed book. It brings into vivid light some of the fundamental truths of the kingdom of God. It does not deal with events so much as it does with great facts and principles, facts which are in a peculiar way related to the interests of God's people in a time of severe persecution and martyrdom. The keynote of this entire division of the book is assurance and comfort. The messages are clothed in great symbols that often seem to be at first sight vague and mystical, and which we must interpret with utmost care. For this task we earnestly implore the strength and unerring guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A revelation of important religious facts.

INTRODUCTION (Chapters 4, 5)

The vision which opens this general division of the book is entirely distinct from the former one. That one was on the Lord's day, this takes place some time afterwards. In the former vision Christ was among the churches; this is a theophany or a vision of God upon his throne. That was an earthly view, this is a heavenly view.

Two visions contrasted.

These two chapters give us an awe-inspiring vision of God sitting upon his throne holding in his right hand a sealed book or roll. When no one could be found who was able to open the closed book, the Son of God appears on the scene and gives full assurance that he will break the seals of the roll. This is glad tidings of the rarest kind, tidings of such vital import that every living creature of the universe responds in praise and adoration, both to Christ and to God.

An awe-inspiring vision.

The Vision of God upon the Throne (4:1-3)

"After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter.

A theophany.

"Straightway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne; and he that sat was to look upon like jasper stone and a sardius: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon" (4:1-3).

The rapture of heavenly glory.

John is again brought through the power of the Holy Spirit into a vision or trance in which he, through an opened door in heaven, sees God sitting upon his throne. This theophany, like all others mentioned in the Bible, is so bright with heavenly splendor that there is no distinct image of God apparent (cf. Isa. 6; Ezek. 1; Hab. 3). The most highly colored stones or glittering gems known to the author were added to the imperial glory of the rainbow, that he might express somewhat adequately the sublimity of the occasion.

Earthly figures essential.

This theophany or vision of God is like all other theophanies of the Bible highly symbolical. Our only way of forming a concept of the spirit-world is through the channel of our earthly scenes and experiences. We must bear in mind that God is a Spirit (cf. John 4:24) and that spirits are not visible to us while we are living in the flesh. **"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18).** The vision of God sitting upon the throne is a metaphorical accommodation to our earthly concept of his sovereignty. He is the eternal Sovereign of the universe

A metaphorical accommodation.

and his sovereignty is thus expressed in the common symbol of a monarch. It might be well for us to think of the infinite God in the immense figure of Isaiah, "Thus saith Jehovah, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest?" (Isa. 66:1).

Auxiliaries to the Throne (4:4-7)

"And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their heads crowns of gold.

Twenty-four elders.

"And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders.

"And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

The seven spirits.

"And before the throne, as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal;

"And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle" (4:4-7).

Four living creatures.

There are in this division three distinct groups of personalities surrounding the throne: the twenty-four elders, the seven spirits, and the four living creatures. These are all symbols entering very prominently into the activities of this section of the apocalypse.

Three groups of personalities.

The twenty-four elders, without doubt symbolize in a broad general sense, the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles: or in other words they represent both

The twenty-four elders representing the redeemed in glory.

the Old and New dispensations of grace. The twenty-four thrones on which they sit are, like the throne of God itself, to be considered as a figurative accommodation for expressing the idea of victorious triumph and reigning in freedom. These twenty-four elders, therefore, symbolically represent the fact that God's people of both the Old and the New covenants reign in triumph with their God in glory. Their main function here as well as elsewhere in the book, is to manifest a spirit of worship and of adoration, in the righteousness and purity indicated by their white robes.

Expressions
of the power
of God.

The lightnings, voices, and thunders are symbols of the divine power, and are overawing accompaniments similar to the experience of Israel at Sinai (cf. Exod. 19:16-18). They seem also to have a punitive function, as we shall see in the further study of the book (cf. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).

The Holy Spirit,
heaven's en-
lightening
torch.

The seven lamps or torches (Greek Lampas) before the throne of God represent the seven Spirits, or the Holy Spirit, already mentioned in the greeting of the book (cf. 1:4). Torches were in common use in the days of Christ and the early church (cf. Matt. 25:1, 4, 7, 8; John 18:3). The seven Spirits are mentioned again in connection with the active ministry of Christ in opening the seven seals (cf. 5:6). The Holy Spirit enters very prominently into the activities of the apocalypse. The sublimity of the occasion was yet further deepened by the appearance of a sea of glass, somewhat similar to the glittering firmament of Ezekiel's theophany (cf. Ezek 1:23-26).

The symbolical
import of the
four living
creatures.

There were also present before the throne four living creatures somewhat like the seraphim of Isaiah's vision (cf. Isa. 6:2, 3), and in other respects like the cherubim

of Ezekiel (cf. Ezek. 1:5ff; 10:1ff). There can be no reasonable doubt that the living creatures in all these texts are symbols. Daniel, too, had a vision in which he saw four living creatures, which he interprets as symbols of four leading kings and nations of the world (cf. Dan. 7:3-8, 15-28). These living creatures of our text are too incoherent and unnatural to be considered in any literal sense as real beings. Each one of these four has a form peculiar to itself; one a lion-form, one a calf-form, one a man's face, and one the form of a flying eagle. It might be well to notice here also that each one of Ezekiel's cherubim had all four of these forms, and was therefore much more complex than those of our text (cf. Ezek 1:10). Each one of the living creatures had six wings, and was in this respect similar to the seraphim of Isaiah. They were also full of eyes. There has been considerable fanciful speculation as to what these living creatures represent. They seem to symbolize, as we shall see in our later study, four of the fundamental principles or powers of the plan of salvation. Their particular function in this immediate connection is that of adoration. They take the initiative in the great anthem of praise which immediately follows.

Similar to the cherubim and seraphim and other living creatures of the Old Testament.

Anthems of Adoration (4:8-11)

"And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.

"And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, to

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders adoring God as the Creator and Sovereign of the universe.

him that liveth forever and ever, the four and twenty elders' shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth forever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

"Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created" (4:8-11).

Four living creatures taking the initiative.

In these beautiful hymns of praise the four living creatures take the initiative. They duplicate the great holy-song of the seraphim of Isaiah (Isa. 6). But while they take the lead, they find a quick response and a full coördination in the devotion of the twenty-four elders. This is not a redemption song such as we find in the following chapter, but it is a song of creational glory, adoring God as the Creator and Sovereign of the universe.

This chapter the background of the one following.

This chapter does not stand alone, it is but a general approach and background to chapter five. It enables us to appreciate, in a measure, the glory of him who held in his hand the sealed book, the opening of which is the theme of this section of the book of Revelation. It also enables us to get an initial view of the accessories of the throne which play such a vital part in the various scenes that follow.

The Sealed Book in the Hand of God (5:1-4)

"And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

“And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon. And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon” (5:1-4).

This brief paragraph brings to light some remarkable things about the sealed roll: it was in the right hand of God, and was, therefore, completely under his control; it was written on both sides and thus contained a message of double fullness; it was sealed with seven seals and consequently was perfectly closed; a strong angel with a great voice made an appeal to have it opened; it must, therefore, have contained a very important message. But to the great sorrow of the revelator, no one could be found anywhere who was able to open the book, or even to look at it with the view of considering the problem; and only as it was opened and its truth divulged was it of any practical value.

Remarkable things concerning this book.

Christ Willing and Able to Open the Book (5:5-7)

“And one of the elders saith unto me, weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. And he came, and he taketh it out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne” (5:5-7).

The comfort of knowing that Christ is willing and able.

The sad aspect of a closed book was soon changed to gladness, when one of the twenty-four elders brought the news that Christ could open these seals.

Three important metaphors of Christ.

The loud call of the strong angel could apparently reach none other than Christ himself. Christ comes into this scene under the representation of three symbols: the first is the **"Lion of the tribe of Judah,"** a term probably based originally on the patriarchal blessing-text in Genesis (49:9, 10). This figure is a metaphorical illustration of power: as the lion has controlling power in the animal kingdom so Christ comes upon this scene with divine strength sufficient for the task. The fact that it is said, **"He hath overcome to open the book,"** plainly indicates that even in his lion-power it took a supreme effort to do it. The second term applied to him was a common Old Testament expression for the hope of the Messiah. The prophets looked longingly forward in the hope that the kingdom might again be restored to its Davidic glory; and the royal succession of the Davidic line of Judah was evidence to them, inspired as they were, that the Messiah would be of the root and branch of the house of David (cf. Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8). The third symbol was the **"lamb."** The lamb was one of the most important Old Testament sacrificial types of the Messiah (cf. Isa. 53). And it was in the very beginning of Christ's ministry applied to him when John the Baptist said, **"Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29)!

The Lion, the
Root of David,
and the Lamb.

Significant in
the opening of
the seals.

These three terms are exceedingly significant in connection with the opening of the seals: the **"Lion"** has overcome, the **"Lamb"** has been slain, and the **"Root of David"** indicates the ruling power attributed to Christ. The Lamb had seven horns which indicate that he had perfect power and authority. **"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and earth"**

(Matt. 28:18). The Lamb also had seven eyes indicating that he had perfect enlightenment. The seven eyes are the seven Spirits mentioned previously (cf. 1:4; 4:5). This certainly represents the fact that Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit and was doing this work under the administrative power of the Holy Spirit. These facts lead us to believe that the sealed book must have had a very close and vital relation to the plan of salvation. As Christ, under the power of these metaphors proceeds to take the sealed book out of the hand of God, the whole living universe unites in an exulting symphony of praise.

The perfect enlightenment.

The Universal Anthem of Praise (5:8-14)

"And when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sing a new song, saying,

The universal symphony.

Worthy art thou to take the book,

And to open the seals thereof:

For thou wast slain,

And didst purchase unto God with thy blood

Men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation,

Twenty-four elders and four living creatures.

And madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests;

And they reign upon the earth.

And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a great voice,

Innumerable
host of angels.

Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain
To receive the power, and riches, and wisdom,
And might, and honor, and glory, and blessing.

And every created thing which is in the heaven, and
on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and
all things that are in them, heard I saying,

Unto him that sitteth on the throne,
And unto the Lamb,

Every living
creature.

Be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory,
And the dominion, forever and ever.

And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the
elders fell down and worshiped" (5:8-14).

The great
redemption
song.

As soon as the Lamb had taken the book out of the hand of God, thus giving assurance that the seals would be opened, the four living creatures, accompanied by the twenty-four elders bearing golden harps and bowls full of incense, instruments representing the praise and prayers of the saints, fell down in a most worshipful attitude before the Lamb, and began to sing a new song. This new song is a great redemption hymn: men of every nation are redeemed by the blood of Christ. By virtue of this redemption they are a royal priesthood and they reign upon the earth (cf. 1:5, 6; 20:4-6; 1 Cor. 4:8). This hymn is in full harmony with what Peter says concerning the Christians, "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

This song is supplemented by the response of the angelic hosts of heaven and then the revelator hears a reëchoing response from every created being, from the utmost corridors of the universe. There is no record elsewhere of such a sublime awe-inspiring anthem of praise. We can but stand in awe, and wonder, and wait for the opening of this sealed book. These two chapters (4, 5) are but the introduction to the opening of the seven seals; and if we are to expect the truth hidden in the sealed book to be commensurate with the spirit of this introduction, the opening of the seals certainly will bring to us a vital message.

If this is the
introduction
what about the
message?

OPENING THE SEVEN SEALS (Chapters 6-11)

In accordance with the assurance given in the preceding chapter, the Lamb now opens the seven seals of the sealed book one by one. The opening of each one of these seals reveals a message in general harmony with the tenor of the hymn we have just noticed. The various phenomena accompanying the opening of the seals must, of course, be interpreted in the light of the immediate context in which they occur, and in the light of the historic setting of the book. And again they must be so interpreted as to harmonize with the great fundamental teachings of the gospel. To this end may the Holy Spirit lead us step by step through the intricate mazes of these mighty symbols!

Opening the First Seal (6:1, 2)

"And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder Come.

And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer" (6:1, 2).

Opening the seal is revealing the truth, as opening a sealed letter or document is bringing to light its contents. Opening the first seal involves two acts: a call comes from one of the living creatures; and in response there comes a rider on a white horse. The living creature that makes this call is certainly the first one, bearing the lion-form (cf. 4:7) because in the opening of the next three seals, the second, third, and fourth living creatures make the calls respectively (vs. 3, 5, 7). In tones of thunder, characteristic of the

Things to keep in mind in the interpretation of these difficult texts.

Rider on a white horse.

A message of the utmost importance.

lion's roar, the living creature says, "Come." The added words "and see" of the King James version are not in the best manuscripts and do not properly belong to the text. The tones of thunder in which the call is given denotes the extreme urgency of the message. The prophet Amos employs the same metaphor in speaking of Jehovah's messages of urgency (cf. Amos 1:2; 3:8).

The rider on the white horse, in a divine pantomime, brings the message of this seal. He had a bow in his hand, a symbol of victory; a crown was given to him, indicating that he was a king; and it is said "he came forth conquering, and to conquer," or in other words, he was supremely victorious. The fact that he rode a white horse indicates that his mission was one of righteousness and purity. It will help us in understanding the mission of this rider to notice a similar circumstance in the nineteenth chapter. Christ was certainly the Rider mentioned in chapter nineteen, as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. The mission of both these riders is exactly the same.

Two white horse riders.

We must conclude, therefore, that the white horse rider in the opening of the first seal comes with the same kind of victory that the one brings in chapter nineteen, a victory for the gospel. The message of the first seal is therefore the positive assurance of victory for the kingdom of God. And, indeed, what could be more welcome and more essential to a people suffering under the severe persecutions of martyrdom than to know that victory is sure? And what could be more in harmony with the spirit of the redemption song of the introduction (chap. 5)? At times it may have appeared to the Christians in their severe conflict with

The first seal gives positive assurance for a great victory for righteousness.

heathenism, that Christianity would be crushed out of existence, but the leaven of saving truth was gradually permeating the Roman Empire through the ministry of the gospel, and victory was certain. No one will ever know how much such encouragement as this must have meant to the suffering church of that age.

The hopeful
gain where the
hopeless fail.

Assurance of victory is one of the strongest factors in the grounding of faith. To be hopeless and pessimistic about an undertaking is to weaken faith, and most emphatically cripple one's efficiency for work. This is true in every line of work, whether secular or religious. The Jews in Babylonian captivity were so hopeless that the prophet Ezekiel compares them to a valley full of dry bones (cf. Ezek. 37:1-14). As it was his mission to put a new spirit into them, and revive them with the hopes of the future, so John in our text brought a divine stimulus, to tide the faith of the saints through the siege of persecution brought upon them by the "Babylon" of the Roman Empire.

Christ was
hopeful.

To be optimistic and hopeful like Christ our Lord himself, when he said, **"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation"** (Mark 16:15) is to have a bouyancy and power absolutely essential for the highest interests of the kingdom of God in every age of the world. It is only when we have the full assurance of the final victory of the gospel, that we can do efficient work in the Master's kingdom. **"The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea"** (Hab. 2:14).

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

Jesus reigns
where'er the
gospel scepter
awaits.

From north to south the princes meet,
To pay their homage at His feet;
While western empires own their Lord,
And savage tribes attend His word.

To Him shall endless prayer be made,
And endless praises crown His head;
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
With ev'ry morning sacrifice.

People and realms of ev'ry tongue
Dwell on His love with sweetest song,
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on His name."

—Watts.

Opening the Second Seal (6:3, 4)

"And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come.

And another horse came forth, a red horse: and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another: and there was given unto him a great sword" (6:3, 4).

The red horse
rider.

As the lamb opened the second seal, the second living creature called, and there come forth in response a rider upon a red horse, whose mission it is to take peace from the earth.

Christ in giving his commission to the twelve apostles metaphorically expressed the idea of sacrifice in the same words which accompany this symbol saying:

The conflict
that brings
peace.

"Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

A complete
self-surrender.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:34-39).

A New Testa-
ment classic on
sacrifice.

The text just quoted is a New Testament classic on Christian sacrifice and it is the best commentary which we can find on the second seal. Christ is, indeed, the Prince of peace but the peace he brings to the individual often causes serious conflict in the family or in the neighborhood. It takes complete self-surrender in everyone who will become a disciple of the Lord and this, too, at any cost. It is the second living creature, the one bearing the form of a calf (4:7) which calls forth this rider. The one thing above everything else for which the calf or ox stands in the Bible is that of sacrifice (cf. Lev. 9:3, 8; Heb. 9:9, 19, etc). The horse bearing this messenger is red, having been dyed in sacrificial blood.

A vivid picture
of the early
church.

This seal is veritably a vivid picture of the experiences of the church at that age. It is an immediate accompaniment to the first seal, for where there is victory, there is certain to be sacrifice; and where there is sacrifice, victory is sure. Commensurate with the sacrifice is victory. "The blood of the martyrs is the

seed of the kingdom." In no age of the world did the Christian church grow so fast as when its loyal advocates were scattered far and wide by the Jewish persecution, or later on, when the Pagan powers in mad rage attempted to stem the onward tide of Christendom. But when the church began to theorize and speculate about the great mysteries of the gospel, about the incarnation, the atonement, the eucharist, the relation of the members of the Trinity, and many other questions of similar import, she forgot that her growth and her very life depended upon her sacrifice. She became self-centered and ceased to grow, in any vital sense of the term. As Christ gave his life in daily living sacrifice and as he finally died upon the cross for the salvation of the world, so he intends that every one of his followers shall surrender himself to promulgating the interests of his kingdom: he says, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). "He that doth not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:38). Sacrifice is absolutely essential to a normal growth of the Christian and on the other hand it is just as indispensable in the spread of the kingdom of God.

Sacrifice the ground of success.

Speculation, a ground of failure.

Probably the greatest need of the church to-day is to have the cross of Christ translated over into vital Christian experience. If we would have the triumph of the white horse rider, we must be willing, as was our Master, and as were the Christians of the early church, to pay the price in the sacrifice represented in the scene of the second seal.

The cross translated into Christian experience.

“Demands my
soul, my
life, my all.”

“When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

—Watts.

Opening the Third Seal (6:5, 6)

“And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come.

And I saw, and behold, a black horse; and he that sat thereon had a balance in his hand.

And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a shilling, and three measures of barley for a shilling; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not” (6:5, 6).

The opening of the third seal brings to our notice the cry of the third living creature. In response to its call there came forth a rider on a black horse having a balance, the common emblem of justice, in his hand. As the rider appeared upon the scene, there came a voice from the midst of the four living creatures, giving instruction how to adjust the wage scale with the ordinary commodities of life. This was mercy giving temper to justice. Throughout the entire Bible the balance and its accompanying weights stand as sym-

The black
horse rider.

A divine
equation.

The balance
the symbol of
justice.

bolts of justice (cf. Micah 6:10, 11; Dan. 5:27; Job 31:6, etc., etc.). The cry that comes from the midst of the four living creatures says, **"A measure of wheat for a shilling, and three measures of barley for a shilling; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not."** The measure mentioned here is the choenix, containing about a quart. The measure of wheat was the regular standard of a day's ration for one person; a somewhat larger allowance was ordinarily made in barley, it being a cheaper and coarser grain. The denarius, translated a shilling and sometimes a penny, was a small silver coin worth about sixteen and two thirds cents. It was the generally accepted standard for the wage of a day's labor for one person (cf. Matt. 20:9, 10, 13). We see, therefore, that according to the justice here proclaimed, each individual was given rations according to his daily earnings, or in other words, this is an equation of personal responsibility. It is a fact that in matters of final rating in morals, each person stands upon his own responsibility, and the awards will be according to what the individual has done, and not according to what others have done. Fortunately, however, there were no restrictions on the oil and the wine. Oil and wine are common symbols of joy and health and in these there is no restriction (cf. Psalms 104:15; 45:7; Isaiah 61:3; Luke 10:34).

Mercy giving
temper to
justice

Personal
responsibility.

Oil and wine
in abundance.

In times when adversities and persecutions abound, it has a stabilizing effect upon us to know that, after all, justice finally will prevail. Justice and sacrifice are often very difficult to harmonize. The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth, says, **"Wherefore we faint not; though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day."**

The value of
knowing that
God is just.

Assurance is
the dynamic
of hope

For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18). He also says, "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable. Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour? I protest by that glorying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:19, 30-32). From these texts we can plainly see that the apostle Paul believed that there would be a full retribution for the sacrifices made in this life in the cause of Christ. And further than that he also believed that if there were not an assurance of retribution man would not be able to make the sacrifices common to Christian life. It is even said of Christ "For the joy that was set before him" he "endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

On the other hand, it is essential to know that the enemies of Christ and his kingdom will receive justice at the hand of God. The Bible is full of texts proving this to be true.

Opening the Fourth Seal (6:7, 8)

"And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come.

And I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him,

The pale
horse rider.

And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth" (6:7, 8).

In opening the fourth seal, the fourth living creature calls and there comes forth a rider on a pale horse, representing the power of death. This rider was given authority to bring death upon a certain portion of the inhabitants of the earth. Not only was death at his command, but the future destiny as represented by Hades, was accorded to him. The text does not state definitely upon whom this judgment was brought, but there can hardly be any doubt that it is a picture of judgment brought upon the enemies of the kingdom of God. In other words, this seal properly complements the third seal and is the sounding of the death knell by the justice of God.

Judgment
awaits the
wicked.

The opening of these first four seals does not, as it is sometimes thought, reveal a succession of ages or a series of wars and famines; but it does reveal some of the fundamental factors entering into the progress of the gospel, and vitally essential to the welfare of God's people, in the age in which the book was written, and for all the ages since that time. The four seals run parallel and most beautifully complement each other, twining themselves into a quadruple strand of assurance and comfort. The messages they bring are absolutely in harmony with the tone of the redemption song sung in the introduction in chapter five. It was the infusion of new life into a crucial age of the church.

These four
seals running
parallel.

In connection with the opening of each one of these first four seals, the four living creatures take an important initiative in calling forth the main agency of

The four living
creatures, the
exponents of
triumph,
sacrifice,
justice, and
judgment.

the revelation. Their forms and functions seem to blend harmoniously into the general spirit of the seals respectively. They seem in general to symbolize the fundamental principles of which these first seals are successively the exponents, triumph, sacrifice, justice and judgment. If, as has been previously suggested, it is true that the twenty-four elders symbolically represent God's people of both the great dispensations of grace, then it is perfectly reasonable that the four living creatures, associated as they are continually with the twenty-four elders, and active as they are in the opening of the first four seals, should represent these four great principles in the plan of salvation.

Opening the Fifth Seal (6:9-11)

"And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

The voice of
the dead
speaking for
the living.

And they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course" (6:9-11).

When will the
retribution
come?

The opening of the fifth seal reveals an important question and its answer. The first four seals have given the church the positive hope of triumph, the absolute necessity of sacrifice, the promise of justice, and the assurance of judgment. But the question still remains, "How long, O Master, the holy and the true,

dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" This is but another way of saying, when will be the day of final retribution? It is a question that has bothered men in all the ages of the world, and especially so in times when persecution was severe and patience was thoroughly tested.

The question
of the ages.

The clause which designates these persons as being souls underneath the altar is a metaphorical expression for the word martyrs; as in the altar service the blood of the animals flowed down beneath the altar, and as at times the life blood of the dead cried out of the ground (cf. Gen. 4:10; Isa. 26:21), so now in our text, those who have given their lives in testimony of the gospel cry out from beneath the altar. The answer in response to their question brings first of all to each one of these martyrs a white robe, emblematic of divine glory; and it also gives them the assurance that it will not be long until the judgment will come upon the earth. One thing yet, however, remains to be done before that time and this is, that the saints are to give their lives in sacrifice as well as those who have already done so. This is an urgent appeal to every child of God to give his life as a sacrifice for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God. When once the church awakens to the fact that heaven is waiting for her to make the sacrifice essential to carrying the gospel to all the world, it will not be long until the world will ripen for the final harvest. Peter says, "**The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is long suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness**" (2 Pet. 3:9, 11)?

The final
retribution
will come
when saints
have made
their sacrifice.

"The time is short. Then be thy heart a brother's
 To every heart that needs thy help in aught;
 Soon thou may'st need the sympathy of others.
 The time,
 The time is short."

—*Butterworth.*

Opening the Sixth Seal (6:12-7:17)

Two divisions.

This seal has two distinct phases: one in which the dark forebodings of the wicked are very vividly portrayed (6:12-17); and the other in which the hope of the righteous is even more clearly set forth (7:1-17).

DARK FOREBODINGS OF JUDGMENT (6:12-17)

The tremor
 of earth.

"And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs when she is shaken of a great wind. And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

The tremor
 of men.

And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand" 6:12-17)?

Where shall
 the ungodly
 and sinner
 appear?
 (1 Peter 4:18)

Several of the former seals have already strongly vindicated the fact that judgment is imminent and inevitable to the wicked. The first half of the sixth seal still further strengthens this fact by giving a very vivid picture of the consternation which this dark foreboding

brings to them. Words hardly express the awful fear and terror of the ungodly when once they are brought face to face with the Judge of the living and the dead. The very elements of nature seem to enter into the terror of the occasion. The sting of a troubled conscience and the pangs and contortions of remorse seem to be but faint premonitions of what awaits the man of sin.

Lest this gloomy picture should cast its shadow upon the saints and thwart the purpose for which it was given, the revelator at once follows this scene with a strong contrast, in the glowing hope of the people of God.

PROTECTION AND HOPE OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS (7:1-17)

The second half of the sixth seal, recorded in the seventh chapter, contains a hopeful, inspiring vision for the children of God. It gives this vision in two separate scenes, the first being a picture on earth where, through the intervention of the divine sealing, the saints are made immune to all the judgments common to the world (vs. 1-8). The second is a view of their triumphant state at the throne of God in eternal glory (vs. 9-17).

Two great scenes of comfort and hope.

The Sealing of the Saints (7:1-8)

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree.

And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

The saints immune to the judgments of God.

A symbol of
all the saints
of all the
world.

And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel:

Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand" (7:1-8).

A strong
contrast.

While, as we saw in the preceding paragraph, the wicked are terror-stricken at the approach of judgment; the righteous are immune, being divinely protected from the adverse winds of judgment. Our vision reveals the judgment of God, vested in the command of four angels, one standing at each compass of the earth. The fact that they are thus placed plainly indicates that the judgment pending is to be general and world-wide.

Sealed by the
Holy Spirit.

A fifth angel appears upon the scene on an errand of mercy; he carries the seal of the living God. With a loud voice he stays the hand of judgment until the saints are sealed. The Holy Spirit is the seal by which God's people are thus made immune to all the adversities that come in the wake of judgment. Paul in writing to one of these seven churches says, "In whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest (or pledge) of our inheritance,

unto the redemption of God's own possession" (Eph. 1:13, 14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:21, 22). Sealing on the forehead was the custom of branding the slave with the name or official mark of his master. It is here used as a metaphor for the divine imprint of God that is made upon the soul of the redeemed by the Holy Spirit. No one can break this seal, or efface the mark, or seriously molest him that is thus sealed excepting as he himself is untrue to the pleadings of this divine Monitor. **"Grieve not the Holy Spirit in whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption"** (Eph. 4:30; cf. Rom. 8:26-39).

The one hundred and forty-four thousand is a symbolical, all-inclusive number for the children of God. The same figure is again used in chapter fourteen, verses one to five. This sealing is not done on some great spectacular occasion. It is an age-long process under the benign influence of the Holy Spirit as he administers to us the grace of God. Thus, while the wicked are living in constant fear of an eternal doom (cf. Heb. 2:14, 15) and are day by day deepening their guilt, the righteous on the other hand are rejoicing and growing more and more like their divine Master, even in the adversities that come upon them, and are looking forward in the hope of eternal glory (cf. Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 5:1-5).

An age-long process.

Import of the sealing.

The Redeemed in Glory (7:9-17)

"After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, with palms in their hands; and they cry with a great voice, saying,

Salvation the song of the saints in glory

Salvation unto our God
 Who sitteth on the throne,
 And unto the Lamb.

Adoration the
 song of the
 angels in glory.

And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, saying,

Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving,

And honor, and power, and might,
 Be unto our God forever and ever. Amen.

They are those
 who have
 overcome.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence come they? And I say unto him, My Lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Eternal bliss.

Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:9-17).

Four distinct
 scenes.

This most beautiful picture contains four distinct scenes: in the first an innumerable throng of the redeemed, stands singing before the throne of God (vs. 9, 10); in the second, the angelic host joins with the

redeemed in this song of praise (vs. 11, 12); in the third, one of the elders explains who this great throng is (vs. 13, 14); and in the fourth he describes in strong symbols the blessings of the redeemed in their heavenly home (vs. 15-17).

The redeemed under the symbolical figure of Israel in the early part of this chapter are the innumerable throng of our present picture. They were sealed and hence exempted from the judgments to which the wicked were subjected; and are here bearing palms of victory and singing songs of praise for their triumph through the power of the gospel. The angels, too, are with them surrounding the throne and are adoring the God who has brought such great salvation to his people.

One of the twenty-four elders informs John that this great company of the redeemed are those who have made the sacrifices already mentioned in the second and fifth seals and have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. The great tribulation of John's age certainly affords an adequate historical context for this scene. The elder also very briefly, but in glowing terms, describes their eternal home. This description is certainly very highly figurative as it necessarily must be, since it is impossible for us to have any concept of the spirit-world except as we have it prefigured by our own familiar scenes of life. The picture is a brief miniature of the elaborate description which we will find in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two.

The elder's
interpretation.

A brief retrospect of the sixth seal brings to view a very marked contrast, a contrast that ought to impel a most serious thought of life. On the one hand the wicked are harassed and worried over the dark forebodings of

This contrast
is a powerful
appeal.

the future but on the other hand the righteous, who put their trust in God, have a peace that passeth understanding and have the buoyant hope of eternal glory as a constant comfort, regardless of the trials and persecutions to which they are subject. This contrast alone is a message of such vital power that it ought to constrain every sinner to cast his lot with the righteous.

Opening the Seventh Seal (Chapters 8-11)

The breaking of the seventh seal resolves itself into a series of trumpet alarms: seven angels are seen standing before God, and they under divine commission sound in succession their seven trumpets of warning. These alarms are then immediately accompanied by serious calamities, seemingly premonitions of an awful judgment. These calamities are not in themselves judgment, so much as they are chastisements, or calls to repentance. Their probationary element is apparent in a number of instances (9:20, 21; 11:13; etc.).

The seven trumpets of forewarning.

The phenomena accompanying these trumpet sounds seem to be highly figurative expressions for the providences of God in some form or another. There are many records, both in Biblical and in general history, in which startling phenomena have been interpreted, and rightly so, as divine providences, evidently designed to call men back to God. The plagues of Egypt (Exod. 5-12) are a good instance of this. There are also many other examples of this in the history of God's dealings with Israel; especially is this true in the record of the prophets (cf. Amos 2:9-16; 4:6-13). It is to this end that Joel gave his people the vision of the locust scourge (cf. Joel 1:2-2:14); notice especially the earnest trumpet call which he gives in immediate connection with this vision, as an appeal for repentance (cf. Joel 2:15-17). Joel also says that in the latter days when the Spirit is poured out upon men, and when under this divine afflatus men and women shall prophesy, Jehovah will accompany this ministry with wonders, thus deepening the call to repentance (cf. Joel 2:28-32).

The providences of God call to repentance.

Old Testament examples.

This prediction becomes profoundly true in the history of the early church (cf. Acts 2:17-21, 43; 5:12; 6:8;

Illustrated history of early church.

9:3-7; 16:25-34). We must keep constantly in mind that the historic setting of this book demands that we so interpret these symbols as to have their primary application for the church in its great conflict with the heathenism of the cruel Roman Empire. This is the more clearly seen when we compare the seven **"trumpets"** with the seven **"bowls of wrath"** in chapter sixteen.

The seven trumpet alarms blending into the seven bowls of wrath.

It might be well to notice at the opening of this section that there is a very close similarity between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath, so marked is this that we must conclude that the seven bowls of wrath are in general thought identical with the seven trumpets, except that the trumpets are warnings of danger while the bowls of wrath are more strongly accentuated and climax into final judgment. For convenience in our study we will quote a brief extract of both the **"seven trumpets"** and the **"seven bowls"** in parallel columns. It will be well to examine this carefully and study them in this light.

A remarkable parallel.

Trumpets (Chaps. 8-11)

Vials (Chap. 16)

"1. Fire and blood on the earth.

"Grievous sore on the earth.

2. Fire and blood on the sea.

Blood in the sea.

3. Wormwood on rivers and fountains of water.

Blood in rivers and fountains of water.

4. Darkness of sun, moon, and stars.

Scorching heat from the sun.

5. A fallen star—the opening of the abyss—darkness—locusts.

Darkness on the throne of the beast, and in his kingdom.

6. Loosing of four angels in the Euphrates, and issuing of a great host to hurt and destroy.

Drying up of Euphrates —appearance of three unclean frog-like spirits—gathering of kings to war.

7. Consummation, with announcement of divine judgment; voices, thunders, lightnings, and hail."

Consummation, with announcement of divine judgment; voices, thunders, lightnings, and hail."

—Donald Fraser.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SOUNDING OF THE TRUMPETS (8:1-6)

"And when he opened the seventh seal there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw seven angels that stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.

And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

The angel with the golden censer helps the saints.

And the angel taketh the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

The angel with the golden censer casts coals upon the earth.

And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound" (8:1-6).

The half hour of silence immediately following the opening of the last seal is a brief suspense in which the

Half hour of silence.

very songs of heaven are hushed before the tragic scenes that are about to follow when the seven trumpets are sounded. Thus the prophets again and again plead for silence in the presence of Almighty God in the face of great calamities (Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13). The half hour is not to be taken in any literal sense, but signifies a brief fraction of time as compared with the great eternal interests that are at stake.

The angel wafts the prayers upward; but hurls the coals down, to the consternation of the world.

In close connection with this period of silence and the appearing of the seven angels is the appearance of another angel on the scene, ministering at the golden altar of incense. Offering incense is a Mosaic ritual symbolizing prayer (cf. Psalms 141:2; Luke 1:9,10). The angel is represented as aiding the prayers of the saints or in other words the scene gives the saints the assurance that their prayers have reached their desired destination. But while on the one hand he brings comfort and assurance to the faithful, on the other hand with the same golden censer he takes coals from the same altar and hurls them down upon the wicked world. This overturned censer with its burning coals immediately sets the elements of the earth into a commotion; then the thunder and voices, and lightnings and earthquake merge into the phenomena of the trumpet alarms. This altar scene very vividly portrays the fact that opportunities of salvation which are either neglected or spurned become determining factors in condemnation. To have the great privilege of communing with our God in prayer, and the assurance that our prayers are availing; and yet to spurn this opportunity is to rest under the weightier condemnation.

Opportunities spurned, determining factors in condemnation.

SOUNDING OF THE FIRST TRUMPET (8:7)

"And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth:

The first trumpet.

And the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up" (8:7).

The first calamity of this trumpet series is a terrific hail storm somewhat similar to the one recorded in Exodus, "So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation" (Exod. 9:24; cf. Psa. 18:12, 13). The horror is still further deepened by the blood which mingled with the hail and the fire. It is possible that the trees and grass might in the revelator's mind represent men; at least in the account of the first "bowl of wrath" (cf. 16:2) men are very seriously affected. Severe as this judgment was, it was only partial, and it apparently bore a message of warning to those who were not immediately affected by it. The "one third" in the case of each one of the first four trumpet alarms should not be taken too literally. It merely represents the idea of partial and not entire destruction and carries therefore a probationary message.

A terrific hailstorm.

SOUNDING OF THE SECOND TRUMPET (8:8, 9)

"And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea:

And the third part of the sea became blood; and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed" (8:8, 9).

An awful
volcanic
upheaval.

The sounding of the second trumpet brings into view a great burning mountain, seemingly an awful volcanic upheaval and eruption. The prophet Jeremiah, in a similar figure, brings a charge against Babylon for its adverse attitude to God's people: "**Behold, I am against thee, Oh destroying mountain, saith Jehovah, which destroyest all the earth; and I will stretch my hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain**" (Jer. 51:25). So the revelator also warns the Babylon that is proving to be such a menace to the Christian church. It may be a fair question in our minds as to whether the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which occurred in 79 A. D. and played such havoc with Pompeii, Herculaneum and other cities in the vicinity, might not have made an impression in the revelator's mind deep enough to have formed the general background for the vision of this catastrophe.

SOUNDING OF THE THIRD TRUMPET (8:10, 11)

The fallen star.

"And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the foundations of the waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood:

And the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter" (8:10, 11).

Wormwood for
the wicked.

The third trumpet introduces a great star which fell from heaven, as the preceding one had revealed a burning mountain thrown into the sea. It is quite difficult to know how much of the imagery of these visions was meant to be definitely interpreted. This star may represent some important person who has fallen, as in the

case of a similar picture in Daniel (cf. Dan. 8:10, 24), or it may be a forecast of the falling of the nation itself, similar to the metaphor used by Isaiah in speaking of the fall of Babylon (cf. Isa. 14:12). One thing, however, is certain and that is, that it brings a very bitter wormwood-like experience upon the enemies of God's people. In the third bowl of the wrath of God (16:4-7), corresponding to the third trumpet, it is plainly said that this is a severe judgment which has come upon those who have been shedding the blood of the saints.

SOUNDING OF THE FOURTH TRUMPET (8:12)

“And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner” (8:12).

The sun, moon, and stars.

In the sounding of the fourth trumpet, the heavenly bodies are brought into the plague scene somewhat like the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars in the severe locust scourge of Joel's vision (cf. Joel 2:10). Nothing much is said in this connection concerning the results, but in the corresponding fourth bowl of wrath (cf. 16: 8, 9), the indication is that the calamity was very severe. But severe as it was, it failed to yield salutary results, for the men who should by such a providence have been brought into a state of penitence hardened their hearts and blasphemed God.

Darkness warns.

The fourth trumpet is immediately followed by a new scene introducing the last three trumpet alarms: **“And I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, for them that**

A sad outlook.

dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound" (8:13). This brief message positively declares that the three remaining trumpets are serious woes.

SOUNDING OF THE FIFTH TRUMPET (8:13-9:11)

The eagle and
the three woes.

"And I saw and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.

The fallen star,
Apollyon.

And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven fallen unto the earth: and there was given to him the key of the pit of the abyss. And he opened the pit of the abyss; and there went up a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

The scorpion
locusts tor-
menting the
sinners.

And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads.

A fearful
torment.

And it was given them that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a man. And in those days men shall seek death, and shall in no wise find it; and they shall desire to die and death fleeth from them.

Exceedingly
hideous.

And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared for war; and upon their heads as it were

crowns like unto gold, and their faces were as men's faces. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to war. And they have tails like unto scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men five months.

They have over them as king the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue he hath the name Apollyon" (8:13-9:11).

The sounding of the fifth trumpet ushers into view a remarkable plague in which a star fallen from heaven called Abaddon and Apollyon, is given the privilege of tormenting in a most excruciating way those who are wicked. This star he calls Abaddon because in the Hebrew language this noun means destruction. The word occurs in the Hebrew Old Testament six times (cf. Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Psa. 88:11; Prov. 15:11; 27:20); but its verbal cognate, meaning "to destroy," occurs a hundred and eighty-one times, and is therefore a very common word in Old Testament usage. The Greek word Apollyon means about the same as the Hebrew word Abaddon. There can be no doubt that this fallen star represents Satan (cf. 12:9).

"Prince of the
infernial
regions."

The instrument with which he torments the people is a large body of most hideous locusts. The locusts of this scene are in some respects like those in the vision of Joel (Joel 1:2-2:11), but they are much more grotesque. The creatures are so complex that their imagery seems to have been borrowed from almost everywhere: their shapes in the main are like horses prepared for war; they had crowns of gold upon their heads; they had the

Grotesque
figures.

figures of men; they had hair like women; they had teeth like lions; and they had breastplates of iron; the sound of their wings was like the sound of horses and chariots rushing to war; they had the stinging tails of scorpions with which they inflicted excruciating pain upon those who had not been sealed with the seal of God, as was the happy throng in chapter seven. And finally, their leader, king Abaddon, was this fallen star. It is altogether likely that these locusts arrayed in such a combination of grotesque figures are meant to represent the demons or unclean spirits so frequently mentioned in the gospel stories.

A complex
figure with
plain truth.

Highly figurative and complex as this scene is, the truth it bears is very plain and practical. It is a common habit of Satan, even in this world, to terrorize and most fearfully tantalize his own subjects in every way possible; and yet in the face of this, instead of becoming disgusted and leaving him, they gnaw their tongues and blaspheme God (cf. 16:10, 11).

SOUNDING OF THE SIXTH TRUMPET (9:12-11:13)

The sounding of the sixth trumpet alarm is introduced by a brief note of warning, saying, "The first Woe is past: behold, there come yet two Woës hereafter" (9:12).

The alarm that was sounded on this occasion bears two distinct messages: the first is a severe scourge of death brought upon the portion of the world through the instrumentality of four angels (9:13-21); and the second is a serious calamity brought upon the people for refusing to accept the gospel of salvation (10:1-11:13). Two divisions.

Scourge of Death (9:13-21)

"And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel that had the trumpet, Loose the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates.

And the four angels were loosed, that had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, that they should kill the third part of men. And the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand: I heard the number of them. Great army.

And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates as of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone: and the heads of the horses are as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceedeth fire and smoke and brimstone.

By these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which proceedeth out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouth, and in their tails: for

their tails are like unto serpents, and have heads; and with them they hurt.

Another warning unheeded.

And the rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk: and they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts" (9:13-21).

Like the Babylonian scourge.

This message tells of the coming of a great calamity upon an idolatrous people. It is designed to lead that people to a recognition of the true God. The voice which commands the situation and calls forth the providence, comes from the golden altar which is before God. It is positively, therefore, a divine decree. The leading agents in this judgment are four angels which are represented as having been bound at the river Euphrates. The Babylon of ancient times was situated on the Euphrates river and it was there that it was brought under severe judgment and destruction in harmony with the indictment of the prophets (cf. Isa. chaps. 13, 14; Jer. chaps. 50, 51). Thus, too, the angels of judgment are now called forth to inflict judgment upon another Babylon, which is Rome.

The scourge failing to yield a wholesome response.

The instrument through which these angels bring their judgment is a large body of horsemen. The number of horsemen in the cavalry is represented as being two hundred million. This immense number is either a tremendous hyperbole designed to give an overawing concept of the calamity or it is an attempt to express the idea of an army of countless numbers. Commentators differ considerably in the application of this scourge: Some

think that it refers to the heartless Mohammedan inroad against the Roman Empire; while others think that it involves the effort of the semi-barbarous hordes from the North which frequently overran the Empire; there are still others who believe that these armies are symbols of various calamities which were brought to bear upon the idolatrous nation. Whatever it was, it is plainly stated that it failed to make a salutary impression upon the people, for it is said that **"They repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."**

Opposing the Gospel Message (10:1-11:13)

For convenience we will consider the second half of the sixth trumpet alarm in two sections: the first of these is an introduction in which the revelator receives a commission to preach the gospel (10:1-11); and the second is an example of earnest gospel ministry, which yet fails to make a wholesome impression upon the world (11:1-13).

Two divisions.

The Commission to Preach the Gospel (10:1-11)

"And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire; and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left upon the earth;

An urgent message.

And he cried with a great voice, as a lion roareth: and when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

Seven thunders.

The seventh,
final.

And the angel that I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth forever and ever, who created the heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that there shall be delay no longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.

Eat the book.

And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard it again speaking with me, and saying, Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel that standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, saying unto him that he should give me the little book. And he saith unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey.

Sweet and
bitter.

And I took the little book out of the angels' hand, and ate it up; and it was in mouth sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter. And they say unto me, Thou must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (10:1-11).

Preliminaries
to the
commission.

This brief paragraph contains four distinct scenes. A powerful angel under the figure of strong symbols, with a small open book in his hand, comes first into view. Judging from his appearance and the tone of his cry, his mission must have been one of vast importance. As he cries in the strength of a roaring lion, seven thunders peal out and echo in response; these thunder tones at once so deeply impressed the revelator that he was about to record the significance of their message, but the angel

forbade him and told him not to divulge their secret. The tidings couched in these thunder tones, and sealed up by John, must have been something entirely different from the glad tidings of the little open book which formed the basis of the commission. We do not know what message they had to peal forth, unless, perchance, it might have some close relation to the final seventh trumpet mentioned in this same paragraph. This mighty angel then in a great oath declares that the gospel tidings will be finished at the sound of the seventh trumpet. It seems to be on account of the great importance of this fact that the commission is here enjoined.

The message
of the seven
thunders sealed.

The commission is a double one, the first part being a command to prepare the work by eating up the little book which the angel had in his hand, while the second is a command to prophesy to many peoples and nations and tongues and kings. Eating up the book is a strong figure of speech brought over from Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:1-3) for acquiring the contents of the book. As food is appropriated through the process of mastication and assimilation so the Word of eternal truth is appropriated and becomes a vital part of one's life that he may do efficient service for the Master. John was also informed that the process of getting the truth was sweet and pleasant, but that giving it would result in bitterness. The strong persecution mentioned in the next paragraph is veritably a vivid illustration of this fact.

A double
commission.

Eating up
the book.

The Gospel Message Unheeded (11:1-13)

"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. And the court which is without the temple leave without, and

A preparatory
survey.

measure it not; for it hath been given unto nations: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Witnessing
for Christ.

And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three-score days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth. And if any man desireth to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth and devour-eth their enemies; and if any man shall desire to hurt them, in this manner must he be killed. These have power to shut the heaven, that it rain not during the days of their prophecy: and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they shall desire.

Mocking the
martyr.

And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. And from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations do men look upon their dead bodies three days and a half, and suffer not their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and make merry; and they shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth.

And after the three days and a half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them that beheld them.

And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they went up into heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell; and there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand persons: and the rest were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven" (11:1-13).

Giving glory
out of fear.

There are five distinct scenes in this paragraph as follows: verses 1, 2; 3-6; 7-10; 11, 12 and 13. It will be well for us to notice each one of these separately and then look at them as a whole.

Five scenes.

In harmony with the commission given to John in the last paragraph of the preceding chapter, he now begins his service by measuring the temple. Measuring the temple is a symbolical expression for taking a general census or survey of affairs, preparatory to the service which is to follow. In other words, he is getting the lay of the ground.

The lay of the
ground.

In the second scene, recorded in verses three to six, we have a graphic picture of strong testimony to the gospel, a testimony which is given against severe protest, and even in the face of martyrdom. In this paragraph John brings forward from the Old Testament a number of vivid illustrations and weaves them metaphorically into his story. The duration of the witnessing, and likewise the duration of the persecution, is said to be forty-two months (cf. 13:5), or in other words, a thousand two hundred and three-score days (cf. 13:5). This is a time-symbol taken from the book of Daniel and appropriated several times in the apocalypse, and is used in several different forms. In Daniel it is given in the phraseology of a "time and times and half a time" (Dan 7:25; 12:7)

Three years
and a half.

as it is also in Rev. 12:14. One and two and a half is three and a half, or one half of seven, a broken number. As it is used both in Daniel and Revelation, it indicates the duration of the persecution of God's people. It is indeed consoling to know that the number is fragmentary and not complete. In our immediate text, as we have already said, it indicates the duration of the persecution and incidentally also of the witnessing.

The
metaphorical
significance
of the two
witnesses.

The revelator, having himself eaten the little book, is represented as beginning this gospel ministry; but immediately there come upon the scene two witnesses metaphorically borrowed from the vision of Zechariah. The prophet Zechariah lived and prophesied in Jerusalem after the Jews had come back from the Babylonian captivity. It is well known to those who are acquainted with the records of Ezra and Nehemiah that after restoration of the Jews they at once began to rebuild their temple and city, and also that they were hindered from completing their work. So strong was this hindrance that even the king of Persia, under whose dominion they were, was influenced to pronounce an edict against the project (cf. Ezra 4:1-24). It is under these circumstances that the prophet Zechariah had several visions enabling him to present with considerable emphasis the will of Jehovah to his people. In vision the prophet saw the seven-branched golden lamp of the tabernacle standing between two olive trees, so connected with them as to be spontaneously filled with olive oil directly from the trees, and without priestly intervention. This vision very vividly and forcefully taught the prophet and his people that if their leaders, Joshua and Zerubbabel, were in vital contact with Jehovah through the power of the Spirit of Jehovah as this lamp was in contact with the

source of its power, their difficulties would vanish, and the mountain of opposition standing before them would become a plain, and the building would be completed amid the shoutings of grace (cf. Zech. 4:1-14). The two witnesses, therefore, who under the power of the Spirit of God were successful in the days of Zechariah, become in the apocalypse proper types for those who witness in the gospel ministry. No more can the Roman Empire stem the onward tide of the gospel ministry while its witnesses are under the power of the Spirit of God than could the Persian power retard or hinder the building of the temple in the days of the prophet. These two witnesses, then, represent the faithful, Spirit-filled church of the martyr age and in fact, of every age of the gospel ministry.

The power of
the Spirit of
God.

These two witnesses were for a season under divine protection, so much so that it is said, **"If any man desireth to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies."** They had the power of Elijah when he shut the heavens against the rain (cf. 1 Kings 18:1ff; James 5:17, 18), that is, their prayers were effectual even to the shaping of providences in behalf of the cause. As Moses brought the plagues upon Egypt so they, too, brought plagues upon their enemies.

Protected by
the providences
of God.

Although they were exempted from death for a season, they, too, like their Master, bore witness at the expense of their lives: the beast from the abyss, that is, Satan, finally overcame them and killed them. This brief section, verses seven to ten, is almost a re-enactment of Calvary. What joy it was to the enemy to see the innocent martyr burned at the stake or torn to pieces by the wild animals in the arena! - The cruel Pagan powers thought that their trouble was over when they had killed

A cruel world
mocking the
Christian
martyr.

those who, out of sincere love, had preached to them the gospel of grace. The ringing shouts of triumph from thousands of spectators in the great Roman amphitheatres, when thus the innocent Christians were torn to pieces, was almost the height of savagery, and yet it was a common occurrence, as is well known to those who are acquainted with the history of those awful times.

A duplicate of the resurrection and ascension.

Verses eleven and twelve give a picture of the resurrection and ascension. This is not an exact duplicate of the resurrection and ascension of Christ, but it is so nearly like it that we are compelled to believe that Christ's experiences as recorded in the gospels were the general historical and metaphorical background of it. It is given here to give positive assurance of final victory to those who, like their Master, are faithful in his service. Such assurance must have been fraught with great blessing in the trying times of that age and it carries the same hope to the church in general.

Every means failing to bring wholesome results in some people.

Verse thirteen is the closing section of the paragraph and gives the result of this ministry as it particularly concerned the wicked. A severe providence is said to have accompanied this ministry, bringing judgment upon many who were wicked and warning others to return to God. But even this providence combined with the earnest ministry of the gospel failed to bring wholesome results. Those who were not killed outright were merely frightened and out of fright gave glory to God.

Portraying the justice of God.

This entire episode, recorded in chapters ten and eleven, is of course very highly figurative and gives a symbolical scene of the gospel ministry of John's day and that age of the church. It gives comfort to the Christians in the hope of a personal final triumph; and on the other hand it

very clearly vindicates the justice of God. The greatest effort that it is possible to make in bringing men to salvation often proves to be a failure where men are determined not to yield to the benign influences inaugurated for their salvation.

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 "Upon the Word I rest,
 So strong, so sure,
 So full of comfort blest,
 So sweet, so pure!
 The character of salvation,
 Faith's broad foundation."
 —*Havergal.*

SOUNDING OF THE SEVENTH TRUMPET (11:14-19)

"The second Woe is past; behold, the third Woe cometh quickly.

Kingdom song.

And the seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign forever and ever.

Song of triumph
by the twenty-
four elders.

And the four and twenty elders, who sit before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshiped God, saying,

We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast; because thou hast taken thy great power, and didst reign. And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath come, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints and to them that fear thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth.

And there was opened the temple of God that is in heaven; and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant; and there followed lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail" (11:14-19).

End.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet is called the third or last of the three woes. These three woes are but another method of designating the last three trumpets (cf. 8:13) and it is to be noted that this last one carries with it a strong sense of finality: "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings (the gospel) which he declared to his

servants the prophets" (10:7). If, as we assume, the seven bowls of chapter sixteen are duplicates of the seven trumpets, the sense of finality is made still more positive, for in speaking of the seven bowls of wrath the revelator says, **"In them is finished the wrath of God"** (15:1).

There is a very marked contrast between the opening of the seventh seal which calls forth the sounding of the trumpet series (cf. 8:1) and the sounding of the seventh trumpet. At the opening of the seventh seal there was profound silence in heaven for a short season, while at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which is the final message of the seventh seal, there were great voices in heaven (cf. 11:15). The voices that are heard are an expression of gratitude for the great victory that has been gained, for the final triumph of righteousness over all its enemies. The kingdom of God, which Christ founded while on earth, for the coming of which in all its fullness he had taught his disciples to pray, **"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth"** (Matt. 6:10), had now come in all its glory, and was about to be handed over to God, the Sovereign of the universe (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

A contrast between the beginning and the ending.

This victory is a much larger one than can ever be attributed to the conquering of the Roman Empire, or to any other event, or series of events, prior to the final consummation of the Kingdom. The opening of the seven seals and finally the sounding of the seven trumpet alarms certainly have their primary setting in matters that pertain to the welfare of the church in its conflict with heathenism in the Roman Empire. But while that is true, they deal with problems so vital to the interests of the kingdom of God at large that they are applicable wher-

An event of world-wide application.

ever and whenever God's people are battling with the forces of evil. It is to be noticed, too, that the twenty-four elders appear again at this juncture, and falling upon their faces and worshiping, they join the great throng in praising God that the final judgment day has at last come. There can be no question that the revelator has here in mind the great final day of accounting.

A REVIEW OF THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

A powerful
vindication
of the justice
of God.

In taking a general survey of the sounding of the trumpets in chapters eight to eleven, we find that there is a unit in the entire section, and that the focal point of this unit is judgment. It is a series of scenes most powerfully vindicating the justice of God. These scenes do not necessarily, as we have already indicated, represent historical events so much as they represent fundamental principles or forces in the plan of salvation; principles especially applicable to the age in which the book was written, and in a general sense to the entire gospel age. The probationary element so evident in a number of texts (cf. 9:20, 21; 11:13; 16:9, 11; etc.) positively prevents this section as a whole from being considered a judgment scene, similar to that which Jesus gave in his great discourse on eschatology (cf. Matt. 25:31-46), although it does finally culminate in such a scene.

Comfort to the
saints and a
challenge to
the world.

This division, like the main body of the book as a whole, has a two-fold purpose: it has first of all a strong message of assurance and comfort and warning for the saints under circumstances in which they especially need it; on the other hand, it gives an important challenge to the world. In this particular section the latter of these two aims undoubtedly predominates. The scene at the

incense altar at the opening of the seventh seal (cf. 8:3-5) is a valuable key to this entire group of scenes: a free and adequate access to God is fully assured in the fact that the Christians' prayers avail; but, on the other hand, the same scene makes it evident that when this opportunity is either neglected or spurned, judgment is inevitable. This, then, becomes a complete vindication of the justice of God.

The providences revealed in the first four trumpet alarms (cf. 8:6-12) ought to have brought every wicked man to his senses, even as Saul of Tarsus was in a similar way constrained to recognize his Saviour and God (cf. Acts 9:3-9). There can be no doubt whatever that many of the people, yes, very many of them, opened their eyes to the truth and responded to these calls; but the ones mentioned in this section are only those who stoutly refused to do this, and they can bring no charge of injustice to God. The world's history is full of providences which, on the one hand, make a loud appeal to the sinner, and on the other hand, give a positive forewarning of the day of judgment.

Provident calls
unheeded.

The terrible torment which Satan and his agencies bring upon the wicked, even in this world, as demonstrated in the symbols of the fifth trumpet (cf. 9:1-11) ought to make everyone willing and anxious to leave him and turn to God. That Satan is a hard master to those who are his subjects is evident on every hand, and this alone ought to be ample warning for what they may expect in the future.

Serving the
Satan who
torments them.

In the sixth trumpet the golden altar makes yet another appeal; and the gospel is preached even to the sacrifice of martyrdom. Yet in the face of such appeals of self-

Judgment
the only
alternative,

sacrifice, men still continue to turn down the means of grace, and to scorn and ridicule those who give their lives to bring it. This was so then, it was so in the days of Christ, and it has been the case in every age of the world. God has certainly been faithful in all that it seems possible to do, and if men as free moral agents, will not accept the benign influences of salvation, but on the other hand deliberately choose to serve Satan, judgment is the only alternative.

THE GREAT FINAL CONFLICT

(Chapters 12-22:5)

This is the third general subdivision of the book, covering, in the main, the same ground that each of the two foregoing sections does, and is, in a measure, a duplicate of them. In this division the leading agencies of the conflict come into clearer view than they did in the preceding sections; and matters that were under consideration in the former sections come to a final head.

There are three divisions in this portion of the book: the introduction, in which the leading agencies of the conflict appear (chapters 12, 13), the main body of the argument, finally emerging into the seven bowls of wrath (chapters 14-16), and an explanatory conclusion (chapters 17:1-22:5).

Three subdivisions in the third division.

THE INTRODUCTION TO THE PERSONNEL OF THE CONFLICT (Chapters 12, 13)

The introduction is a very important part of this general division of the apocalypse. It divides naturally into two subdivisions: the woman, the child, and the dragon (chapter 12), the two Satanic beasts (chapter 13).

The Vision of the Woman, the Child and the Dragon (Chapter 12)

For convenience we will study the three paragraphs of this chapter separately. It divides naturally as follows: the leading agencies (12:1-6), the genesis of Satan's work (12:7-12), and the woman persecuted (12:13-17).

THE LEADING AGENCIES (12:1-6)

"And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was

The woman and the child.

with child; and she crieth out, travailing in birth, and in pain to be delivered.

The great
red dragon.

And there was seen another sign in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems. And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon standeth before the woman that is about to be delivered, that when she is delivered he may devour her child.

And she was delivered of a son, a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and three-score days" (12:1-6).

The Jewish
mother church.

The woman represents the faithful Jewish mother church, while her child is Christ, and her other children are the Christians (cf. 12:17). The sun, moon, and stars give this picture an Israelitish coloring, the background of which appears in the dream of Joseph, where Isaac, his wives, and the twelve patriarchs are represented by these symbols (cf. Gen. 37:9, 10). Travailing to bring forth the Messianic Child is a common figure of the prophets: Jeremiah says, "For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that gaspeth for breath, that spreadeth her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul fainteth before the murderers" (Jer. 4:31; cf. also 30:6; 49:24; Micah 4:9, 10; Isa. 26:17; 66:7, 9; Hosea 13:13). This is a very strong figure appealing to the people of God to be true to their Messianic hopes, and here in Revelation it repre-

The Son of
God.

sents the fact that the Son is born and is ready to enter the conflict.

The dragon, both here and in the later chapters of the book, represents Satan. The figure has originally a mythological derivation: there has been in all ages of the world, a fabled dragon, a monstrous serpent in the sea. It is altogether possible, too, that the revelator may have had in mind the promise which Isaiah made to his people when he said: "**In that day Jehovah with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan the swift serpent, and leviathan the crooked serpent; and he will slay the monster that is in the sea**" (Isa. 27:1). His seven heads, and seven diadems or crowns, and ten horns shows how large and complete is his control of the world (cf. Luke 4:6). The stars which he pulled down with his tail may possibly represent important men who have been overthrown through Satanic influences or it may even, and the more likely, represent the angels which have fallen with him.

The dragon a mythological figure.

The supreme effort of the dragon seems to have been to destroy the new-born Child (cf. Matt. 2:16). This antagonistic spirit and effort is seen throughout the whole ministry of Christ; the resurrection and the ascension alone finally exempt him from any such assaults. The fact that the woman (Israel) became the target of Satan's efforts when he could no longer wreak his vengeance against Christ, is a well-grounded fact in ancient history.

The dragon's supreme effort.

THE GENESIS OF SATAN'S WORK (12:7-12)

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels going forth to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels; and they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven.

A victorious conflict in heaven.

And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him.

Rejoicing
over Satan's
discomfiture.

And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuseth them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death.

Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea: because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time" (12:7-12).

Two sections.

This paragraph contains two parts: Satan and his angels being cast out of heaven (vs. 7-9), and an exultant proclamation of this fact (vs. 10-12).

A great moral
conflict in
heaven.

There have been various explanations of this text, but the plainest and most natural interpretation seems to be that there was actually a great moral conflict in heaven, symbolized here as a war. Michael is a prominent archangel of God and is represented elsewhere in the scriptures as having fought prominent battles for the Lord (cf. Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9). It is also an established fact that angels have fallen from grace and have been cast down, abiding their judgment (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). As we consider the last part of the chapter we shall plainly see that this entire paragraph is parenthetical to the main argument of the chapter, and is apologetic to the introduction of Satan.

It is not said when this conflict was, or when Satan was cast down upon the earth. There seems to be no good reason why it might not have been prior to the fall of man in the garden of Eden, but the time element in no wise concerns our argument here. The fact that Satan is here present and is making a dying struggle for supremacy is certain. The saints of heaven and earth rejoice together that the conflict is short and that the sacrifice of the Lamb of God is sufficient for the occasion.

Satan actually cast out of heaven.

The age-long, world-wide range of Satan's effort is here plainly indicated by his various names: he is called the great dragon because of his horrifying influences; he is called the old serpent, for through the serpent as an instrument he gained his victory in the garden of Eden; he is called the Devil because in the New Testament he has a reputation for his diabolical nature; and finally he is called Satan because he is the adversary of all that is good. Satan is a common Old Testament word in the Hebrew language for adversary. This brief paragraph gives us the pedigree of Satan and the best characterization of him that is found in the entire Bible.

Satan, with all his titles.

It might be well to notice in this connection, that in this general section of the book we have three definite steps in Satan's downfall: first, he failed in his conflict in heaven and was cast down upon the earth; second, he is bound and cast into the pit (20:2); and then finally he is cast into the lake of fire (20:9, 10). Heaven's proclamation of his being cast upon the earth has a jubilant ring, not merely because he landed on the earth, but because in this battlefield he would finally be judged and entirely overthrown through the mission of Christ and his followers. As Waterloo was the fatal battlefield for Napoleon, so the earth is the scene of Satan's ultimate

Three definite steps of Satan's downfall.

defeat. The conflict is short and the victory is sure through the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. The duration of the Devil's struggles on the earth long as it seems is yet very brief in comparison with the eternity which follows.

THE DRAGON PERSECUTING THE WOMAN (12:13-17)

The Jews under
persecution.

"And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child. And there were given to the woman two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman water as a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, that keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus" (12:13-17).

Christ had
predicted
the fall of
Jerusalem.

In this paragraph the author continues the argument which he had dropped at verse six. Satan, failing in his effort to destroy the child, brought the brunt of his persecution to bear upon the Jewish mother-church. Jesus in his lamentation over Jerusalem plainly says that severe persecution awaits her; he cries, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:37). The siege which the Romans under Vespasian and Titus

waged against the Jews in 70 A. D. was one of the severest tests they ever had; indeed, it was one of the most heart-rending sieges on record. It involved the scattering of their people and the destruction of their city and temple; it was the abomination of desolation of the messages of both Daniel and Christ (cf. Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20). Apparently, but for the providences of God she would have been destroyed altogether. It is said, **"And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent"** (v. 14). Being taken into the wilderness upon eagle wings is a figure of speech suggested by Israel's deliverance from Egypt: Jehovah says, **"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle's wings and brought you unto myself"** (Exod. 19:4). This divine protection granted to the woman or Israel is said to have a duration of a thousand two hundred and three-score days, the time and times and half a time, or in other words, the approximate period during which the Christian church is under severe persecution as we shall see it in our further study.

The downfall of Jerusalem under the Roman siege.

The Two Satanic Beasts (Chapter 13)

The closing paragraph in the preceding chapter represents Satan in fierce anger turning against the Christians. The two main agencies through which his siege of martyrdom is brought upon them, are two horrid beasts, characterized in this chapter. We will consider them separately, in harmony with the two sections of this chapter: the first one is characterized in verses 1-10, and the second in verses 11-18.

Satan's two leading agents.

THE FIRST BEAST (13:1-10)

Vision of the
first beast.

"And he stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority.

And I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death-stroke was healed: and the whole earth wondered after the beast; and they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority unto the beast; and they worshiped the beast saying, Who is like unto the beast? and who is able to war with him?

Blaspheming
God.

And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and there was given to him authority to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, even them that dwell in the heaven.

Warring
against the
saints.

And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of the Lamb that hath been slain.

A personal
appeal.

If any man hath an ear, let him hear. If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goeth: if any man shall kill with the sword, with the sword must he be

killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints" (13:1-10).

The first beast as it is characterized in this section is undoubtedly the Roman Empire, under whose domination the Christian church suffered persecution in varying degrees for a period of over two hundred and fifty years. How largely the revelator may have been influenced by the four beasts in the vision of Daniel, we cannot say. Daniel, in vision, saw four beasts which he characterized as four kings of the ruling nations of the world; these empires swayed the political affairs of the world in a very large measure from the days of the Babylonian captivity until the coming of the Messiah (cf. Dan. 7). Some of the leading lines of Daniel's vision blend into the characterization of these two beasts in the apocalypse. It would be well to read the description of Daniel's four beasts as found in Dan. 7:2-8 in order to be able to appreciate the meaning of our text.

The first beast
a symbol of the
Pagan Roman
Empire.

The first beast in this chapter is of course not exactly like any one of the four mentioned in Daniel's vision; but it bears some of the most savage and formidable features of all four of them. It combines the lion, the leopard, and the bear elements of the first three creatures of the Daniel scene, and the ten horns and the general terrifying spirit of the fourth beast, which is itself a representation of the same Roman Empire.

Combining the
horrid features
of the four
beasts of
Daniel.

The seven heads of the beast in our text represent at times the seven hills on which Rome was built; and at other times seven kings (17:9, 10). The ten horns are symbols of ten kings (17:12, 13). It is difficult, if not impossible, to know exactly what seven or what ten kings of the Empire are meant; but it is more than likely that the revelator was not so much concerned about any

Complete
Satanic
authority.

particular ruler as he was about expressing the idea of the strength of the Empire, since both these numbers, seven and ten, are expressions of completeness. It is frequently mentioned throughout this section, that this beast and the second, its associate, received their power and authority from the dragon, or, in other words, they are the instruments in the hands of Satan for persecuting God's people.

Blasphemy
against God.

One severe charge laid against this age was that the people worshiped both the beast and the dragon, and thus brought themselves under the condemnation of blasphemy. Cæsar-worship was one of the common sins of the age, and charges were often brought against the Christians for not worshiping the Emperor. And many of them died in martyrdom rather than thus to blaspheme their God.

An age of
testing.

The time-symbols, forty-two months ("**the time, and times, and half a time**") and "**the thousand two hundred and three-score days**") comes into view again as the duration of the dominating power of this beast. This was preëminently an age of testing and the author in the midst of this characterization again makes the urgent personal appeal which was so frequently made in the seven letters to the churches: he says, "**He that hath an ear, let him hear.**" Destinies depend upon personal decision. Here is the patience and faith of the saints. People never know either how much or how little patience they have, or how strong their faith is, until they are put under the stress and strain of some such testing experiences.

Destiny depends
upon personal
decision.

Smitten but
not killed.

It might be well before passing to the next paragraph to note that one of the heads of this beast was apparently smitten to death (v. 3). This matter enters so largely

into the description of the function of the second beast that it can be better considered there than here.

THE SECOND BEAST (13:11-18)

“And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like unto a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the authority of the first beast in his sight. And he maketh the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed.

A lamb-like
beast.

And he doeth great signs, that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men. And he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who hath the stroke of the sword and lived.

Great signs.

And it was given unto him to give breath to it, even to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead; and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Reviving the
first beast.

Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” (13:11-18).

**Worship a
compulsion.**

The first beast with all its horrors gives place to another, a second beast. The form of the second is not described in detail as is that of the first, but judging from its function, it must have had a form very similar to the first one. Nothing, however, is definitely said concerning its form excepting that it had two horns of a lamb, bearing, therefore, a religious aspect not seen in the form of the other beast. It is, indeed, fortunate that this beast did not have seven horns, the emblem of perfect power, as Christ is represented as having (5:6). The religious aspect appears not only in the fact that it had the two horns of a lamb, but as well, in the description of its function: it is plainly said that it works great miracles or signs, thus deceiving the people. It compels its subjects to worship according to its own ideals of worship. And it is later called the false prophet (cf. 16:13; 19:20).

**Propagating
the Pagan
spirit.**

It exercises all the authority of the first beast and therefore has the political control also; and by this power it compels its people to worship the image of the first beast even with the threat of martyrdom. It speaks in Satanic arrogance, like the dragon itself, and brands its people with its own peculiar, formal ideals.

Papal Rome.

This word picture of the second beast is almost, if not exactly, a duplicate of the history of ancient Papal Rome, which finally merged into the heartless, bloody Inquisition, an institution of martyrdom as awful as the Pagan martyr-age. The second beast seems to come into prominence through the smitten head of the former one; it brings the smitten head to life and turns the Cæsar-worship over to Papal- and image-worship. It seemed that the Pagan martyr beast had a final blow when Constantine, the Roman Emperor, adopted Christianity; but no sooner did the state adopt Christianity than a different

kind of persecution began and a semi-religious beast began its activities. Of course this in its inception was not severe but it grew, until finally, in the Inquisition, it equaled the horrors of Pagan persecution.

The awful
inquisition.

Verse eighteen has been the object of a good deal of speculation. The six hundred and sixty-six has generally been taken as a numerical pseudonym of some person; and all sorts of combinations have been made to fit it into the numerical value of the names of persons who might in any way be implicated. It is a question whether the revelator meant it to apply to any particular name. It is the exact numerical value of the Hebrew letters spelling the words Cæsar Nero; but it is somewhat difficult to understand why Nero should have been singled out from all the other Emperors and given this pseudonym, even though he was one of the ring-leaders of the persecution under the symbol of the first beast. Possibly a still more plausible solution would be found in the fact that the six hundred and sixty-six is also the exact numerical value of the word Lateinos, the Greek word for Latin, the generic term for the country at large, whether Pagan or Papal. After all, the interpretation of this verse does not very vitally concern us. There can hardly be any doubt that the people for whom the book was written understood it, and it is likely that the message it bore was of more consequence to them than it is to us.

Six hundred
and sixty-six.

While the two beasts recorded in chapter thirteen represent the two great martyr agencies of the early and medieval church, they also in a general way symbolize the two great opposing and persecuting powers that come upon the church in all ages, the one from the enraged

In all ages.

world and the other from the injudicious, abnormal element in the effort of the church itself. The major part of the balance of the book is taken up by the conflict between righteousness and these two forms of evil, the final scene appearing when in chapter nineteen these two beasts are put into the lake of fire.

SCENES OF THE CONFLICT (Chapters 14-16)

A series of
visions of angel
ministry.

The argument of this section, as we have already seen, is very similar to that of the former, the seal-opening section. It is somewhat difficult to divide into exactly seven duplicates of the seals but in general the nature of the material is the same. When it comes to the last section there can be no question but that the seven bowls of wrath duplicate the seven trumpets of the seventh seal. While the former section is a series of seal-openings this one is a series of visions of angels bringing messages pertaining to the vital interests of the gospel ministry in the great conflict with Satanic powers. We will take up these visions one by one.

Song of Victory (14:1-5)

“And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

The Lamb and
the redeemed
on Mount
Zion.

And they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth. These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, to be the first fruits unto God and unto the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish” (14:1-5).

The new song
of the saints.

The fruitage
of the promise
of the first seal.

This song of victory reminds us of the great song of the redeemed found in the seventh chapter. There the hundred and forty-four thousand, the symbolical number for the saints, were rejoicing in glory because by the grace of God they were sealed and were enabled to triumph over all their enemies. Here, too, we have the hundred and forty-four thousand rejoicing with a new song because they had been sealed, and had been purchased by the blood of the Lamb. In the opening of the first seal, Christ the Lamb prevailed and called forth a strong assurance of final victory. And here Christ the Lamb is seen standing in the throng of the victorious. The Mount Zion upon which they are standing is evidently a metaphorical term of the New Jerusalem which is so fully characterized in the last two chapters of the book. It must have been exceedingly refreshing to turn from the doleful scenes of chapter thirteen over to this scene of victory, which is again one of the many comfort strains that appear in Revelation.

"When at last my soul shall reach that blissful place,
Saved eternally by His unbounded grace,
I shall sing when I behold Him face to face:
What a Saviour Jesus is!" —Burgeson.

The Eternal Gospel (14:6,7)

The great
commission.

"And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having eternal good tidings to proclaim unto them that dwell on the earth, and unto every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he saith with a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made the heaven and the earth and sea and fountains of waters" (14:6, 7).

This angel evidently represents the church in its ministry of love, preaching the glad tidings of salvation to all the world in harmony with the great commission. The message comes with a great voice because the mission is extremely important. It is very brief but it contains the most important truth of all the world; it is the watchword of the church for every age, from the days of Christ to the final consummation of the kingdom. It was very necessary in that particular age of the world when men were giving so much glory to men, that the church should be again warned that God, the creator of the universe, should alone receive the worship and glory of men. And this is indeed a practical truth for our own or any other age.

A timely message.

The Fall of Babylon (14:8)

"And another, a second angel followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (14:8).

The fall anticipated.

Babylon is a symbolical term for Rome, or probably more nearly the Roman Empire. As Babylon was the great persecuting power of God's people during the days of the overthrow of the kingdom in the captivity of Judah, so Rome attempted to overthrow the kingdom of God in the days of the Messiah and blot out Christianity. This text merely anticipates that overthrow, the actual account of which is given in later chapters (chapters 18, 19). The account is placed here for emphasis, in contrast with the gospel message given in the preceding paragraph. Day by day as the leaven of gospel truth permeates the masses of the Roman Empire its fall is taking place. This is not so much the matter of the destruction

Rome the Babylon.

of the kingdom as it is the putting down of the powers of darkness.

Judgment Against Those Who Worship the Beasts
(14:9-12)

The final
personal
retribution.

“And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worshipeth the beast and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment goeth up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image, and whoso receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (14:9-12).

The third angel brings the intelligence of the severe judgment pending against those who worship the beasts mentioned in our preceding chapter. It is a charge against that part of the Roman populace which failed to respond to the benign influences of the gospel; and which, on the other hand, nerved itself into the antagonistic spirit of its age. The judgment comes under the picture of two metaphors: the first is drinking the wine of the wrath of God, while the second is being tormented with fire and brimstone forever and ever. There cannot be much doubt that he is here speaking of a personal retribution and that he has in mind the final destiny of the wicked. The fire and brimstone is more than likely the same general figure which he mentions later as the

lake of fire (19:20; 20:10), and what is generally known throughout the New Testament as Hell.

Christ and the New Testament writers in teaching concerning the Spirit world have no alternative but to speak of it in the language and figures of our own earthly experiences. When talking about heaven and the abode of the righteous they employ all the rarest and most beautiful things to be found in this world to form in some measure a concept of the glory of that realm; so, too, on the other hand in teaching about the abode of the wicked they employ the severest experiences of this world by which to express the doom of the wicked. What could be more awful than the experience in a lake of fire! And that is the symbol of the judgment of God against those who refuse to accept the terms of mercy.

Understanding
the unknown
by the things
that are
known.

Hope of the Righteous (14:13)

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them” (14:13).

A beatitude
of hope.

Earnest Christian toil is divinely rich in treasures laid up in heaven. The hope of the righteous as it is revealed in these few words is, indeed, a strong contrast to the judgment of the brief section immediately preceding. This promise has a beatific ring which puts a thrill of joy and hope into the breast of those who toil and suffer in the furtherance of the kingdom of God. It is one of a number of the benign benedictions of this book which give a foretaste of eternal glory, and put ballast and buoyancy into the soul.

Earnest
Christian toil
rewarded.

"I count these things to be grandly true!
That a noble deed is a step toward God—
Lifting the soul from the common sod
To a purer air and a broader view."

Gathering the Righteous (14:14-16)

A beautiful
ingathering.

"And I saw, and behold, a white cloud; and on the cloud I saw one sitting like unto a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

A foregleam of
the second
coming.

And another angel came out from the temple crying with a great voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth; and the earth was reaped" (14:14-16).

The parable
repeated.

This harvest picture is a vision of the ingathering of the righteous in harmony with the promise given in the preceding section. This scene and the one immediately following are pictures of the final gathering of both the righteous and the wicked similar to that given by Jesus in the parable of the wheat and the tares (cf. Matt. 13:41-43). These two sections taken together are apparently a foregleam of the second coming of our Lord and a final consummation of the kingdom, although it is not at all likely that that event belongs historically in this chapter of the book.

Gathering the Wicked (14:17-20)

Gathered for
judgment.

"And another angel came out from the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, he that hath power over fire; and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy

sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.

And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it unto the winepress, the great winepress, of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (14:17-20).

This paragraph is a vision of the gathering of the wicked as the former was of the righteous; the paragraphs therefore supplement each other and give a picture similar to the judgment scene given by Christ at the close of his great discourse on eschatology (cf. Matt. 25: 31-46). Taken together these two paragraphs give on the one hand a strong hope for those who are righteous; and on the other hand, timely warning for those who are wicked. The vintage scene in the last two verses is very vivid and telling as an expression of judgment.

Seven Angels with Seven Plagues (Chapters 15, 16)

This vision corresponds very closely with the seventh seal. Seven angels bring seven plagues which are called "seven bowls of wrath." These are poured out upon the world in judgment similar to that accompanying the seven trumpet sounds. Before the judgments begin the revelator has an introductory message, which we must first notice.

Seven bowls
of wrath.

THE INTRODUCTION (15:1-8)

"And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having seven plagues, which are the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and

The last seven.

them that come off victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing by the sea of glass, having harps of God.

Song of Moses
and the Lamb.

And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

Great and marvelous are thy works,

O Lord God, the Almighty;

Righteous and true are thy ways,

Thou King of the ages.

Who shall not fear, O Lord,

And glorify thy name?

For thou only art holy;

For all the nations shall come and worship before thee;

For thy righteous acts have been made manifest.

Coming from
the temple
of God.

And after these things I saw, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, arrayed with precious stone, pure and bright, and girt about their breasts with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave unto the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who liveth forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and none was able to enter into the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished" (15:1-8).

A. strong
contrast.

This introduction to the seven last plagues contains two distinct phases: first there is a very beautiful song of praise, sung by those who have been victorious in the great conflict and have been redeemed. And second, in direct contrast to this song of Moses and the Lamb,

there is a scene in which seven angels prepare to pour the bowls of wrath in judgment upon the world.

The first verse of this chapter, in introducing the seven angels, emphatically declares that in their service the wrath of God finds its final completion. But before proceeding to discuss their ministry he is held by another vision in which he sees those who have gained the victory, singing a most beautiful song of praise to God for his justice and righteousness and for the hope of the redemption of the nations of the world.

In verses five to eight he gives an interesting description of the inception of the work of the seven angels. He sees them coming forth from the temple of God adorned with bright gems and girt with golden girdles. This plainly indicates that the ministry of these angels, serious as it may be, is a righteous one. The fact that they come forth from the temple and that they are adorned with these emblems of glory strongly indicates that their mission is one of divine import.

A severe but righteous cause.

One of the four living creatures comes again upon the scene and enters into this service by giving the seven angels seven bowls full of the wrath of God.

One of the four living creatures.

Notice also in immediate connection with this that the temple is filled with smoke, reminding one of the awe-inspiring occasions in which the high priests on the day of atonement entered into the Holy of Holies in the presence of God. Then, too, as at the opening of the seventh seal (cf. 8:1) there was silence in heaven, so now, no one enters the temple until these plagues are finished. Heaven itself seems to stand in awe at the judgment of the wicked.

An awe-inspiring occasion.

POURING OUT THE FIRST BOWL OF WRATH (16:1, 2)

A commission
from within
the temple.

“And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go ye, and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth.

And the first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a noisome and grievous sore upon the men that had the mark of the beast, and that worshiped his image” (16:1, 2).

Holy incense
bowls bearing
wrath.

The commission given to the seven angels comes from within the temple itself and is a positive indication that their mission is a sacred one. The bowls in which they are represented as carrying the wrath of God are the Holy incense bowls, such as the twenty-four elders used in connection with their ministry of praise and incense offering (5:8). The judgment is declared to be a serious pestilence of some kind on the men who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped the image of the beast, or in other words, those who yielded to sin under the influence of the second beast mentioned in chapter thirteen.

POURING OUT THE SECOND BOWL OF WRATH (16:3)

Second angel.

“And the second poured out his bowl into the sea; and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living soul died, even the things that were in the sea” (16:3).

Upon the sea.

The ministry of the second angel differs very little from that of the first excepting that he brings his pestilence to bear upon the sea and that the animals of the sea rather than men are affected. The term “**every living soul**” refers evidently to animals and not to men. The word soul in its usage both in the Hebrew and in the Greek is a broad term embracing living creatures of any kind. Much of what has been said concerning the sounding of the second trumpet could be said here. It is

difficult to know what the symbolical import of this scene is unless the sea should be taken as a symbol of the people as it is in a later chapter of the book (cf. 17:15).

POURING OUT THE THIRD BOWL OF WRATH (16:4-7)

"And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters; and it became blood.

The third angel.

And I heard the angel of the water saying, Righteous art thou, who art and who wast, thou Holy One, because thou didst thus judge: for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and blood hast thou given them to drink: they are worthy.

The act justified.

And I heard the altar saying, Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments" (16:4-7).

The altar's witness.

As the first angel is represented bringing judgment upon the earth, the second upon the sea, so the third brings his judgment against the rivers and fountains of water. He turns them into blood and thus vitally affects the people who drink these waters. In the midst of this calamity, an angel represented as controlling the waters justifies God the Holy One for bringing this judgment: the cause he says is just, because the people who suffered by it are those who are guilty of shedding the blood of the saints; he declares that those who shed blood ought to drink blood. And in an antiphonal response, the very altar on which the saints made their sacrifice cries out, "Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments." This is then again a vindication of the justice of God.

A strong demonstration of the justice of God.

POURING OUT THE FOURTH BOWL OF WRATH (16:8, 9)

"And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given unto it to scorch men with fire. And

The scorching sun.

men were scorched with great heat: and they blasphemed the name of God who hath the power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory" (16:8, 9).

Blasphemy
instead of
repentance.

The sun now becomes an instrument in judgment with the earth, the sea, and the rivers. It was given power of excessive heat to scorch men; but scorching them had no salutary effect on them. Instead of repenting as they should have done they blasphemed the God who brought the judgment. This text, together with a number of others in this section, and in the section of the trumpets, plainly reveals the probationary purpose contained in these judgments. It not only reveals this, but it also makes it plain that in some cases every effort that is made to save men fails.

POURING OUT THE FIFTH BOWL OF WRATH (16:10, 11)

Excruciating
pain.

"And the fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom was darkened; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they repented not of their works" (16:10, 11).

A loud call,
but only
blasphemy
in response.

The fifth angel brings his bowl of judgment to bear directly upon the beast so as to darken his kingdom. This grounds this judgment within the range of the Pagan powers of which the beast is the symbol. Practically the same results accompany this judgment as that of the preceding one: instead of repenting as they should have done and recognizing this as a call of God, they in turn blasphemed God. In turning back to the corresponding fifth trumpet sounding (9:1-11) we find the vision of awful torment which Satan is allowed to inflict upon his

subjects. It is more than likely that there is a close coincidence between the Satanic effort there and the throne of the beast in this text.

POURING OUT THE SIXTH BOWL OF WRATH (16:12-16)

“And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river, the river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way might be made ready for the kings that come from the sunrising.

Opening the way for judgment.

And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, as it were frogs: for they are spirits of demons, working signs; which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

The demons at work.

(Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.) And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon” (16:12-16).

The sixth angel is represented as pouring out his bowl of wrath upon the Euphrates river and thus drying it up that the kings from the east may cross over it. As we have already seen in our discussion of the sixth trumpet, the Euphrates river is mentioned because of its relation to Babylon. Ancient history tells us that Cyrus, king of Persia, coming from the east, found an entrance into the well-fortified city of Babylon only after he had turned the Euphrates out of its channel. Having dug another channel for the river, he and his army marched through the natural river bed into the city. It was through this remarkable strategy that Babylon is said to have fallen into the hands of the Persians and that the Jews were

Drying up the Euphrates.

granted the privilege of returning to their homeland. Therefore, as Babylon was taken through the drying up of the Euphrates, so, too, judgment is brought upon Rome, the later Babylon.

Unclean
spirits.

Battle of
Har-Magedon.

In the next scene (vs. 13, 14) demons or unclean spirits symbolized by frogs emanate from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, or second beast. These grotesque creatures, by working miracles stir up the kings of the world and gather them together for a great battle called Har-Magedon. Har-Magedon is a compound word from the Hebrew meaning the hill or mountain of Megiddo. Megiddo was situated on the edge of the plain of Esdraelon at an important mountain pass and was noted for its great battle scenes (cf. Judges 5; 2 Chron. 35). There seems to be no question that the primary application of this great uprising is that which is brought against the Roman Empire; but in addition to this local application it must also have a much larger range than can be applied to that event. It may be the picture of a great moral antagonism brought by the powers of the world against the kingdom of God. But lest the children of God should be discouraged at such an outlook, he gives them a comforting beatitude saying, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

POURING OUT THE SEVENTH BOWL OF WRATH (16:17-21)

"It is done."

"And the seventh poured out his bowl upon the air; and there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from the throne, saying, It is done: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since there were men upon the earth, so great an earthquake, so mighty.

And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail, every stone about the weight of a talent, cometh down out of heaven upon men: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof is exceeding great" (16:17-21).

A terrific hail-storm, a symbol of judgment.

In immediate connection with the pouring out of the seventh bowl of wrath, there comes a great voice from the temple of God saying, "It is done." This is the sequel of the earlier statements in the book (cf. 10:5-7; 15:1) and carries with it a strong sense of finality. It is immediately accompanied by the common judgment symbols "and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since there were men upon the earth, so great an earthquake, so mighty." As a result the great city, the Babylon, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon was evidently Rome, as we shall see in our further study. The fact that cities of the nations are also mentioned indicates that the judgment was general. The final leading symbol of this judgment is a terrific hail storm destroying everything in its way. Wicked men, instead of repenting, blasphemed God.

Blasphemy instead of repentance.

The seven bowls of wrath gradually become severer until they consummate in a great final catastrophe. They are punitive but not merely so; they convey the same salutary spirit that is seen in the sounding of the seven trumpets. But the people instead of accepting them as means of grace, turn against God in rank blasphemy.

The import of the seven bowls of wrath.

These providences took place throughout the centuries during which the saints were struggling with the ordeal of martyrdom. And although we know that many during this time turned to God through the ministry of the gospel, there were those who did not and for them every one of these calamities was a dark forewarning of a final condemnation. What was true of that age is true of all ages since then. God apparently exhausts every reasonable means to win men back to righteousness and when they will not yield by voluntary acceptance he has exonerated himself from every possibility of blame: he has proved himself absolutely just, and the only alternative is judgment.

Every
reasonable
means for
saving men
seems
exhausted.

**EXPLANATORY CONCLUSION TO THE GREAT
CONFLICT (Chapters 17:1-22:5)**

This portion of the third general division of the book is a somewhat detailed interpretation and amplification of what we have already studied in chapters 12-16. In the first verse of the seventeenth chapter it is said that one of the seven angels mentioned in the preceding chapter comes to the revelator and promises to give him a vision of the judgment of this Babylon which is recorded as having been destroyed when the last bowl of wrath was poured out (cf. 16:19). This vision or explanation is recorded in the seventeenth chapter and those immediately following it.

**Explains and
amplifies.**

In chapter twenty-one and verse nine, one of the seven angels mentioned in chapter sixteen as bearing the bowls of wrath comes to the revelator and promises to give him another vision, a vision not now of the judgment of Babylon or the harlot as she is so frequently called, but a vision of the bride, the wife of the Lamb, or in other words, the saints. This vision is recorded in chapters 21, 22. It is evident, therefore, that the part of the apocalypse from chapters 17 to 22 is explanatory. It divides logically into two main heads: the first of which is concerning the judgment of Satan, his leading agents and his followers (17:1-20:15); while the second is a highly figurative description of the New Jerusalem, the final abode of the righteous (21:1-22:5).

**About the
harlot.**

**About the
bride.**

**Final Judgment of Satan and His Adherents
(17:1-20:15)**

This vivid story of the final judgment of Satan and his adherents falls naturally under three heads: the judgment of the great harlot (17:1-19:10); the judgment of the

two beasts (19:11-21); and the judgment of Satan and his followers (20:1-15).

INTERPRETATION OF THE JUDGMENT OF THE HARLOT
(17:1-19:10)

For convenience we will consider the account of the judgment of the harlot in two divisions: the vision of the harlot (17:1-18:3); and the judgment of the harlot (18:4-19:10).

Vision of the Harlot (17:1-18:3)

There are two distinct scenes in this section: the first is a detailed characterization of the harlot and her associate agencies (17:1-18); and the second is a preliminary statement of her judgment (18:1-3).

Characterization of the Harlot (17:1-18)

One of the
seven angels.

"And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls, and spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters; with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication.

The woman
riding the
beast.

And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication.

Well named.

And upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF

THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.

And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come.

The mystery revealed.

Here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth: and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition. And the ten horns that thou sawest are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour.

Mystery of the kings.

These have one mind; and they give their power and authority unto the beast. These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they also shall overcome that are with him, called and chosen and faithful.

Comfort to the saints.

And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples and multi-

Wrangling among themselves.

tudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire. For God did put in their hearts to do his mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished. And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (17:1-18).

Carried into
the wilderness.

One of the seven angels fortunately offers to reveal some of the unsolved mysteries. The revelator is again brought under the power of the Spirit or conveyed by trance into a barren wilderness where he is given a vision of the harlot called Babylon. The desert into which he is carried evidently represents and suggests the doleful desolation of the whole occasion. The weird dread of this barren wilderness forms a strong contrast to a later vision in which one of the seven angels transports him into a high mountain and gives him a view of the bride, the wife of the Lamb (cf. 21:9, 10). He finds the harlot in the wilderness of desolation, the bride in the high mountain of glory.

Identified with
Babylon.

The name given to this woman is **"MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH"** (v. 6). It is evident at once, that she is identified with the Babylon already mentioned in several texts: **"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication"** (14:8); and again in the last section of the preceding chapter, as the seventh angel poured out his bowl of wrath, it was said that, **"Babylon**

the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath" (16:19).

He designates the harlot as a city when he says: "And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (17:18); and the text amply assures us that the city he has in mind is none other than Rome, of which Babylon is a very strong proto-type; as Babylon was the tyrant over God's people in earlier days, so now Rome was the severe scourge of the Christians. As Babylon was situated literally on many waters, the harlot is figuratively said to be sitting upon many waters, the many waters representing many peoples (17:15). Rome was certainly, uniquely, the cosmopolitan center of the world. The seven heads of the beast on which she sits are, as he says, seven mountains or hills (17:9). Classic literature fully corroborates the fact that Rome was built on seven hills; while the seven hills are scarcely prominent enough to be called mountains, yet such poetical license is common in the interpretation of visions.

The woman
represents
Rome.

She is also said to be sitting upon a scarlet colored beast. There can be no doubt whatever that the beast refers to one of the two mentioned in chapter thirteen and more than likely to the first one. The scarlet color of the beast represents its mission of bloodshed; it is full of the names of blasphemy, an epithet several times mentioned in connection with the first beast (cf. 13:1-6) and also upon which the wrath of God was poured out by the seven angels (cf. 16:9, 11, 21). It is also said of the beast that "It was not," and that it then comes up out of the abyss; and that later it goeth into perdition. This point in the description coincides or agrees very closely

The woman
riding the
beast.

with the smitten head of the first beast which was revived and became active under the administration of the second (cf. 13:3, 12, 13). It would seem from this statement and other phases of the scripture that the scarlet colored beast is representative of both the beasts in chapter thirteen, just as Rome was the seat of both the Pagan and Papal powers which antagonized Christianity.

The highly
adorned harlot.

The woman was adorned in highly colored garments decorated with gold, precious stones, and pearls. This array of imperial purple and glittering display of ornaments is strongly indicative of her regal splendor and her godless, enchanting allurements. She carried in her hand a golden cupful of her abominations, "**Even the unclean things of her fornication.**" This designation of her sin corresponds exactly with what we know of Rome in the period of her decline. It refers on one hand to the corruptions of sensuality and the various immoralities associated with the idolatry of that age, and in fact, of every age; and on the other hand to an estrangement from God, and an alliance with the gods of the world. Rome, both in its Pagan and in its Papal sense, was noted for this godless degeneracy. The cup was indeed full of abomination; like ancient Babylon, she was drunken with iniquity and was reeling amid the nations of the world (cf. Jer. 51:5-10).

The seven kings
and the ten
kings.

Bible scholars have often grappled in vain with the problems mentioned in connection with the seven kings, and the ten kings in vs. 9-12. Some hold that these refer to the various great nations of the world, while others think that they refer to different forms of government within the domain of the Roman Empire itself, while still others believe them to be kings, some of the Roman age and others of the later ages of the world. An important

statement in verse sixteen gives a ray of light, in saying that the ten horns or kings turn against the harlot and destroy her, a plain prediction of the calamities which later befell Rome from the rugged hordes of the North. It is also said that they attempted to destroy the Lamb, but failing, were themselves destroyed: **"These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they also shall overcome that are with him, called and chosen and faithful."** The word **"overcome"** seems here to be an echo of its common use at the close of each one of the letters of chapters two and three. While the angel's interpretation may leave a few mysteries unsolved, his main argument is unmistakably plain. The harlot-woman and the beast, with all the antagonistic forces which they were able to bring against the people of God, failed in their efforts; and God's people by the power of the Lamb overcame them.

The hopeful aspect plain.

Preliminary Statement of Her Judgment (18:1-3)

"After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird.

An angel of judgment having great authority.

For by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen; and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth waxed rich by the power of her wantonness" (18:1-3).

An angel in the splendor of heavenly glory and having great authority, coming to the revelator, cried out in

A doleful dirge
on the death-
knell of
Babylon.

unmistakable tones, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and become the habitation of demons." This doleful dirge is quoted from Isaiah's arraignment of ancient Babylon (cf. Isa. 21:9). We found that it applied to the Babylon of the apocalypse as a forewarning in an earlier chapter (14:8). Again it is represented as actually having taken place at the pouring out of the seventh bowl of wrath (16:17-21). It is also mentioned here, and again, later in this chapter (vs. 21-24) in fuller detail.

Monumental
evidences
of the truth.

The cause for the judgment is given in the immediate context as luxury and licentiousness. One need but read a brief portion of Paul's letter to the church at Rome to realize the facts in the case: in giving the genesis of the idolatry which was in his day swaying the Roman Empire, and indeed the entire Pagan world, he portrays vividly how licentiousness and almost every other form of sin were a direct accompaniment of idolatry (Rom. 1:18-32). Not only does Paul's letter bear testimony to the truth of our text, but evidence is deeply engraved in the ruins of the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum; cities which were covered up with ashes and lava by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius only a few decades prior to the writing of this book, and the ruins of which still exist to bear witness to the condition of the Roman Empire in those days.

Judgment of the Harlot (18:4-19:10)

Contrasted
scenes.

This subdivision contains two distinct scenes: a vivid scene of the judgment of the harlot (18:4-24); a Hallelujah of victory (19:1-10).

Vision of the Judgment (18:4-24)

A call to
the saints.

"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fel-

lowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues:

For her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Render unto her even as she rendered, and double unto her the double according to her works: in the cup which she mingled, mingle unto her double. How much soever she glorified herself, and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning. Just deserts.

Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judged her. And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more; merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet; and all thyine wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel made of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble; and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep; and merchandise of horses and chariots and slaves; and souls of men. And the fruits which thy soul lusted after are gone from thee, and all things that were dainty and sumptuous are perished The lament of the world.

Worldly spirit.

from thee, and men shall find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning; saying, Woe, woe, the great city, she that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl! for in one hour so great riches is made desolate. And every shipmaster, and every one that saileth any whither, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood afar off, and cried out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like the great city? And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, wherein all that had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye saints, and ye apostles, and ye prophets; for God hath judged your judgment on her.

The mighty
fall.

And a strong angel took up a stone as it were a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft, shall be found any more at all in thee; and the voice of a mill shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the princes of the earth; for with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets

and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth" (18:4-24).

In verse four, the opening verse of this section, there is, first of all, a strong appeal from heaven, urging God's people to keep themselves from the sins of this woman (Rome), lest they, too, should be afflicted with the plagues that are to come upon her. In verses five to eight, immediately following, it is emphatically stated that the judgment which was brought upon her is fair and just, for not only is she extremely guilty of the sins attributed to her, but she is arrogant, proud, and defiant in her sin, for she says: "I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning."

A defiant spirit.

A very graphic description is then given, in verses nine to twenty, of the lamentation which the kings, merchants, and shipmasters of all the world make on account of her destruction. Imperial Rome was truly the mistress of the world and her downfall threw the world into a panic. As the smoke of that city was ascending it is said that the men who were thus deprived of their mistress "Cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, wherein all that had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate."

The brevity of worldly glory.

The angel who carried the revelator away into the desert place to show him the judgment of this harlot, now at last gives him a final vision of her judgment (vs. 21-24); the last paragraph in the chapter is practically a repetition of the judgment that was brought upon her at the pouring out of the last bowl (16:19). The fall is made vivid by an illustration; the angel takes a large millstone and throws it into the sea and says, "Thus with a

The final scene.

mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down."

General
application.

While this scripture finds its first and primary application in the judgment that was brought against Rome for her voluptuous carnality and for being the seat of the supreme martyr agencies of the world, it applies with equal appropriateness to any and every other city in the world which yields to the sins common to Rome. How many cities have fallen along the way which might to-day be living monuments of the blessing of God!

Hallelujah of Victory (19:1-10)

Hallelujahs
of victory.

"After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,

Hallelujah;

Salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God:

For true and righteous are his judgments;

For he hath judged the great harlot,

Her that corrupted the earth with her fornication,

And he hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

And a second time they say,

Hallelujah.

And her smoke goeth up forever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God that sitteth on the throne, saying,

Amen; Hallelujah.

And a voice came forth from the throne, saying,

Give praise to our God,

All ye his servants,

Ye that fear him,

The small and the great.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude,
and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of
mighty thunders, saying,

Hallelujah:

Hallelujahs
of hope.

For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth.

Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad,

And let us give the glory unto him:

For the marriage of the Lamb is come,

And his wife hath made herself ready.

And it was given unto her that she should array
herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen
is the righteous acts of the saints.

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they that
are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And
he saith unto me, These are true words of God. And
I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he
saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant
with thee and with thy brethren that hold the testi-
mony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of
Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (19:1-10).

The blessed
reunion.

This paragraph gives the last of a number of praise
songs recorded in the book: the first ones are recorded in
chapters four and five, where there was an anthem of uni-
versal praise in the prospect of the opening of the sealed
book: there is another in the seventh chapter given by
the numberless throngs of heaven because they have been
redeemed; there is another beautiful manifestation of
praise at the victory which was won at the sounding of
the seventh trumpet (11:15-18); there is still another in
the prospect of the victory that comes through the pour-
ing out of the seven bowls of wrath (15:3, 4); now
finally, when the just judgment of God has been brought

The last song
of the series.

against this enemy of the kingdom, heaven bursts forth in hallelujahs of praise.

The last but
not the least.

The songs of this immediate paragraph celebrate two notable occasions: the first is a song of praise by the multitudes of heaven for victory in the judgment of the harlot; while the second is an expression of great joy at the marriage of the Lamb. Nothing is said as to who composed the great multitude of heaven. It is probable, however, that the throng is made up of the angels and glorified saints. They are immediately joined by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. Their songs are called Hallelujahs. This is the only group of Hallelujah songs in the New Testament, though they are frequent in the Psalms of the Old Testament. The word Hallelujah is composed of three Hebrew words meaning **"Praise ye Jehovah."** This, therefore, is preëminently a group of praise songs.

The marriage
supper of the
Lamb, a strong
metaphor of
the mutual
relationship
between Christ
and his church.

While on the one hand there is great joy at the victory which is won over all the enemies of God and his kingdom (vs. 1-5), on the other hand this manifestation of joy blends beautifully into another song celebrating an event immediately growing out of this victory, that of the marriage of the Lamb. The **"marriage of the Lamb"** is a common New Testament figure or metaphor for the union of Christ and his church at the final consummation of his kingdom. Several of Christ's parables employ this figure of speech for expressing the close relationship between Christ and his people, and especially so, in the hope of his return (cf. Matt. 9:15; 22:14; 25:1-13; cf. also Luke 12:35-40; John 3:29). Paul also uses the same figure incidentally to express the close union between Christ and his church. We must bear in mind, however, that all these texts are very highly figurative, and that

we need not expect any formal marriage service. It is using the closest earthly bond of relationship to express the spiritual union between Christ and his church. The angel supplements this song by renewing the promise in saying, "**Write, Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are true words of God**" (19:9). This brief message is a gem that glows in the light of chapters twenty-one and twenty-two with heavenly luster for every child of God.

"Ten thousand times ten thousand,
In sparkling raiment bright,
The armies of the ransomed saints
Throng up the steeps of light:
'Tis finished, all is finished,
Their fight with death and sin:
Fling open wide the golden gates,
And let the victors in.
What rush of hallelujahs
Fills all the earth and sky!
What ringing of a thousand harps
Bespeaks the triumph nigh!
O day, for which creation
And all its tribes were made!
O joy, for all its former woes
A thousandfold repaid!
O, then what raptured greetings
On Caanan's happy shore,
What knitting severed friendships up,
Where partings are no more!
Then eyes with joy shall sparkle,
That brimmed with tears of late,
Orphans no longer fatherless,
Nor widows desolate."

Hallelujahs of
final victory.

—Alford.

JUDGMENT OF THE TWO BEASTS (19:11-21)

The Son of God
prepared for
the conflict.

"And I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems; and he hath a name written which no one knoweth but he himself. And he is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

The Christian
army in battle
array.

And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure. And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty. And he hath on his garment and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

The opposing
forces in
battle array.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven, Come and be gathered together unto the great supper of God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great.

A great victory
for the kingdom
of God.

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast and them that worshiped his image: they two

were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone: and the rest were killed with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, even the sword which came forth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled with their flesh" (19:11-21).

There are four distinct scenes in this paragraph: the first is a vision of the Son of God prepared for a great conflict (vs. 11-13); the second scene brings to view the agencies of the kingdom of God associated with him in battle array (vs. 14-16); the third scene is a loud call for the final array of the forces of evil (vs. 17, 18); while the fourth and last scene is the actual conflict between these two mighty forces, and the victory for righteousness (vs. 19-21).

Four distinct scenes.

By taking a brief survey of the paragraph we see that the personnel on the one side of the conflict are the mighty forces of the kingdom of God with Christ at their head; while on the other hand the opposing powers are the forces of the world under the leadership of the beast and the false prophet. This, at once, assures us beyond a question of doubt, that this, instead of being a battle of carnage, is a great moral or spiritual conflict. It is absolutely inconceivable that Christ the meek and lowly Lamb, the Prince of Peace should ever engage in any other kind of battle; and then, too, it is positively said that the instrument of warfare, the only one mentioned in this connection, is the sword which proceedeth out of his mouth, "which is the word of God."

A great spiritual warfare.

The white horse on which this Rider comes, like the one in the scene of the first seal opening, represents the cause of purity and righteousness. The one riding upon the horse is called "Faithful and True," "The word of God," "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF

Wearing many, many crowns.

LORDS." These are cardinal gospel terms which apply unmistakably to Christ. War is the symbol of conflict, but it is a spiritual Christian warfare (cf. Eph. 6:10-20): **"In righteousness he doth judge and make war"** (v. 11). The eyes of flaming fire are also part of the vision of the Christ that walks among the churches (cf. 1:14). The many diadems on his head are metaphorically the crowns of him whose kingdom spreads abroad in a spiritual sense throughout all the nations of the world. He is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood. This is a rare figure taken originally from a vineyard scene of those who trampled out the grape juice; but quoted here from a typical prediction of the Messiah in the activities of his kingdom (cf. Isa. 63:1-6). The armies of heaven mentioned here on white horses, a divine cavalry, might possibly be the angelic hosts, but are more likely to be the great armies of Christendom clothed in fine linen, white and pure, which indicate the righteousness of the saints (cf. 19:8).

Harsh means
the last
remedy.

A superficial view of this text might lead one to believe that the only mission here mentioned is a mission of severity and destruction, but the facts are that God never applies harsh means, except where the benign influences of grace fail. It is only when the opposing forces of the gospel ruthlessly turn aside from all that love can do for them that the iron rod or the sword of his mouth bears a message of condemnation: **"The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds"** (2 Cor. 10:4).

A great
triumph for
righteousness.

The calling together of the forces of evil by the mighty angel, standing in the sun, is very, very highly figurative. It is a figure taken from the ancient battlefields where the dead were left unburied for the ravages of the wild beasts

and the birds of carrion ; so now the calling of the birds to this great supper of God is merely a symbolical way of suggesting the magnitude of the victory of God over his enemies. We must bear in mind also that the leaders of the opposing force were the beast and the false prophet, or in other words, the two beasts which came first upon the scene in chapter thirteen. The topic under consideration is, therefore, the mighty battle that Christianity had to wage in martyrdom against the forces of the Pagan and Papal powers. And when, finally, the beast and the false prophet are put into the lake of fire, figuratively speaking, these forces of martyrdom cease, as they did when Christianity won in the great conflict with heathenism, and when the great reformation movement overcame the inquisition with all its heartless horrors.

There can be no doubt that this text will bear a general application to the church at large, in any and every age in which the opposing forces assume the characteristics of these two beasts, either from the standpoint of the external world in all of its various forms of evil, as represented by the first beast, or, on the other hand, from the standpoint of the apostate church as it sets itself against the spiritual interests of the kingdom, represented by the false prophet or second beast.

A broad,
general
application.

SATAN AND HIS FOLLOWERS JUDGED (20:1-15)

“And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.

Satan bound.

The saints
reigning.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshiped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Satan loosed
and judged.

And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The great
judgment
scene.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave

up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire" (20:1-15).

This is the third and last of the judgment scenes of the explanatory section of the book beginning in chapter seventeen. In the first of these, Rome, the harlot-mistress of the world, the Babylon of the Christian Church, is brought under judgment (17:1-19:10); in the second part, the two leading martyr agencies, the Pagan and Papal powers, are condemned in a great victory for the gospel (19:11-21); and the third is the final judgment scene awaiting Satan and all his followers (20:1-15). The first two had, primarily and necessarily, though not exclusively, a more or less local application in the occasion of the book, while the last is certainly very general and final for all the world, as the text itself plainly indicates.

The last of the three great judgment scenes.

This chapter brings before us four distinct scenes: the first one, recorded in verses one to three, following, as it does, the judgment of the great martyr agencies, the opposing powers of the church, declares that Satan is now bound for a season; the second scene, recorded in verses four to six, is a parenthetical insertion, definitely indicating that while Satan is thus bound, God's people are reigning, and will reign until he is again let loose; the third scene is one in which Satan in a final effort is arrayed against the people of God. Fortunately, however, he fails in his project as he had failed before: his followers have been deceived, instead of victory, they

The four scenes of the chapter.

have destruction. A divine intervention saves the day for God's people: but Satan meets the same doom that his two leading agencies of the martyr-age met; they were cast into the lake of fire, and so is he (vs. 7-10). The fourth or final scene of this chapter (vs. 11-15) is a brief account of the great judgment day, so often mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament scriptures. It is immediately associated with the resurrection (vs. 12, 13); and the account is followed by a graphic description of the eternal abode of the righteous.

The ground
of much
speculation.

This chapter is unfortunately the ground of much speculation. There are probably more wild fancies clustering around the interpretation of this chapter than of any other single chapter in the Bible. It will be worth while, therefore, to look very carefully into its meaning, in the light of its immediate context and in harmony with the general spirit of the book. The chapter is emphatically a judgment scene, in which Satan, first of all, is bound, and then finally, condemned.

The millennium.

The parenthesis relating to the reigning saints (vs. 4-6) is the basis of what is generally termed the millennium. The word "**millennium**" is a term derived from the Latin, meaning a thousand and is here applied to the thousand years during which Satan is bound; and during which God's people are, therefore, reigning. This doctrine is sometimes known as the "**the chilliasm**," the term chilliasm being derived from the Greek word for thousand, as the word millennium is derived from the Latin.

Questions to be
answered.

One of the main difficulties in the interpretation of the chapter is to know what it means to have Satan bound and cast into the abyss. Is the binding a process of the ages, or is it some great momentary event? Is the binding symbolically a figure of speech, or was he literally

handcuffed? Does the angel who bound him metaphorically represent Christ, the church, or some other agency, or was it literally an angel? When he is bound and put into the pit, is he entirely inactive and powerless, or is he bound and put out of reach of some particular line of effort? Is the term "**a thousand years**" a phrase for exactly, or approximately, that length of time? or is it, in keeping with the general usage of the book, a numerical symbol for a somewhat extended length of time? Is the term "**deception**" a generic term for sin in general, or did he deceive the nations in some particular sense of the term? These questions, and many others of similar import, can be answered only as we study them in the light of their immediate context and in the general historic setting of the occasion.

It is to be noticed first of all, that Satan, when he is loosed again, calls to his command a very large following, a following so large that "**the number is as the sand of the sea**" (v. 8). It is a legitimate question to ask, Where did he so quickly get so large a host of followers if he was for a thousand years, or a long period of time, entirely inactive? It is definitely said that when he is let loose he will come forth to deceive the nations. What is the nature of this deception? The answer lies unmistakably in the immediate context in the clause "**that he may gather them together to war against the saints**" (vs. 8, 9). But wherein is this a deception? It is a deception only in the fact that their fiendish project is a failure; fire comes down out of heaven and devours them and their plans are thwarted (v. 9). He had made them foolhardy and deceived them enough to believe that they could destroy the Christians, just as the Roman Pagan powers were deceived in believing that they could do the

Satan has a large following; where did he get it?

Deceived into a daring offensive against the Christians.

same. The fire came down out of heaven and devoured them as a divine providence intervening in behalf of God's people (v. 9).

The battle of
Gog and
Magog.

The great siege mentioned in verses eight and nine is the battle of "Gog and Magog." But who are Gog and Magog? The terms are brought over directly from the book of Ezekiel, where in chapters thirty-eight and thirty-nine, the prophet is giving a vision concerning a great battle which is some day to take place between Gog and Magog and God's people, with a tremendous victory for the cause of righteousness. Judging from the context of the prophet's vision, the battle must lie somewhere within the range of the gospel age. No one knows exactly to whom he refers in mentioning Gog; it is probably a mystical term for the far-off nations of the world.

(S) (The term Magog is made up of two Hebrew words, the term "ma", being merely a prefix meaning people, the word therefore means the people of Gog and the entire phrase means Gog and the people of Gog. While this phrase is somewhat obscure and we know of no such people in the world, or in history, it is enough for us to realize that it is the Satanic host arrayed against the people of God.

Another
martyr scene.

This scene is nothing more nor less than another, and a final, great effort of Satan and his people to blot out Christianity, as during the very inception of the gospel age they had already attempted to do. There had been a long lull of a thousand years, metaphorically speaking, since the martyr ages of the past, during which Satan was not able to deceive the nations into such a daring attempt. The conflict is not a regular battle, for the saints are not represented as fighting at all. It bears

more the sense of a martyr scene than it does of a battle. But thanks be to God, the effort failed!

There can be, therefore, no reasonable doubt that the deception which Satan brings upon the nations, when once he is again let loose, is a delusion concerning their ability to destroy God's kingdom and therefore blot out Christianity; verses eight and nine make this very plain. There may, however, be a question in the minds of some as to whether or not the deception prior to the binding, as mentioned in verse three, was of the same nature, when we notice the context in the last paragraph of chapter nineteen immediately leading up to the binding of Satan, we see that the enemies of God's people were acting under exactly the same delusion but that they failed in their project.

The nature of the delusion.

It is practically certain, therefore, that the triumph of the saints recorded in verses four to six is an age of exemption from any such mighty offensive as took place during the Pagan and Papal supremacy. This freedom will last until Satan is again given the power to reunite his forces from the four corners of the earth at the final consummation of the kingdom of God.

An age of exemption.

In our interpretation of verses four to six, as well as of any other part of the book, we must of course be very careful to so interpret the material as to harmonize with the fundamental teaching of the New Testament on these doctrines. It is an established fact in the teachings of Christ and the apostles that the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom and not a political empire, and that Christ, while he was on earth, founded this kingdom, and also that the people become subjects of it by regeneration (John 3:3-5), and moreover, that for all practical purposes the kingdom coincides with the church. A careful,

Harmonizing with the general teachings of the New Testament.

inductive, unbiased study of all the texts in the New Testament on the second coming of our Lord, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment scene, leaves no room for doubt that these three great doctrines of the final issues of the kingdom of God focalize into one supreme occasion.

Before or after
the second
coming.

The question of chief consideration here, then, is, do the events mentioned in verses four to six take place prior to Christ's return, or after his coming? That the saints are still on earth and that the resurrection and the judgment events are still in the future is plainly evident from the text in verses eleven to fifteen. But there still remains an important question concerning the resurrection, mentioned in verses four to six. What is meant by the "**first resurrection**"? And where was the reigning of the saints, in heaven or on earth? If there is a first resurrection, we must naturally assume that there is also a second. Does our text mean, as some teach, that the saints shall be raised, and that after a thousand years the wicked shall be raised and judged? Or does it mean, as others teach, that the first resurrection is a resurrection of a select body of saints, or martyrs, or perhaps of all the saints who are immediately at death transformed to their final state of glory and are now reigning with Christ? Or does it mean, as still others teach, that the mystical or spiritual resurrection, an experience coincident with conversion (cf. John 5:25, 26; Rom. 6:1-14; Col. 3:1-3) is the first resurrection, and that the resurrection of the dead will take place when Christ returns? Of these three views, the last one seems to present the least difficulties and seems to harmonize most fully with this immediate context, as it appears in the light of the New Testament teachings in general.

The first
resurrection.

In brief, therefore, the most plausible interpretation of this chapter seems to be that through the power of the gospel ministry, Satan's plans for putting down the kingdom of God during the early ages of Christianity were gloriously thwarted; and that for an extended season, the redeemed will have the sway, and that the kingdom of God, through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, shall permeate throughout the nations of the world to the fullest realization of the hopes of the prophets, of Christ, and the apostles. And that later, near the close of this dispensation of grace, Satan will be given another privilege to test the people of God, but only to find his plans again thwarted as it is indicated in the final scenes of this chapter. The closing verses of this chapter bring before us the three leading doctrines of eschatology and blend harmoniously over into the last chapters of the book, the vision of the hereafter. The second coming is not definitely mentioned and yet the fire that came down to devour the enemies is elsewhere spoken of as an immediate accompaniment of his coming, for Paul teaches that "To you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:7, 8). The general resurrection and judgment are very plainly indicated as a part of this scripture: "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up

**A brief
summary.**

**The second
coming, the
resurrection,
and the
judgment.**

the dead that were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire" (20:12-15).

"Lead, kindly light! amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead thou me on;
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

—*Newman.*

New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5)

This is a picture of the final state and abode of the righteous and is necessarily one of the most highly figurative descriptions on record. As the preceding scenes of judgment were given by a divine interpreter (cf. 17:1) just so also is this scene of glory given by a divine interpreter. "And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spake with me, saying, come up hither, and I will show thee the bride, the wife of the lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem" (21:9, 10).

A further explanation.

The first eight verses of this chapter are a general introduction to the subject and read as follows: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

A new heaven and a new earth.

And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away. And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he saith, Write: for these words are faithful and true. And he said unto me, They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of

Abiding with God.

life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

The wicked in judgment.

But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death" (21:1-8).

The spirit-world.

This brief paragraph is really a sequel of the preceding chapter: it is a brief epitome of the final state and abode of both the righteous and the wicked. The phrases the "new heaven" and the "new earth" are quoted from the book of Isaiah, in which he depicts the hope of God's people (Isa. 65:17ff). John employs the terms heaven and earth as an expression for what we generally call heaven. He says: "The sea is no more," and later in the chapter he says, "The city hath no need of sun, neither of the moon" (v. 21). From texts such as these and from the fact that the redeemed in the after resurrection life are in the spirit-sphere, rather than in a physical state, we are convinced that he has no physical abiding place in mind when he uses the terms heaven and earth, but that he is using these terms as metaphors to form a concept of the spirit life. It will be seen as we study this general topic, that his descriptions are very largely idealistic, for he uses the rarest and most costly things of this world known to him in forming a pictorial background for spiritual things. He focalizes on the term "New Jerusalem" as the ideal abiding place of the glorified saints as Jerusalem was for ancient Israel.

The righteous and their abode.

He blends two ideas into one. Sometimes he is talking about the bride which applies to the personnel of the kingdom; and at other times he is talking about a city or a place in which they live. The terms church and syna-

gogue are used with similar license, being now applied to a place of worship, and then to the people who worship there. There can be no doubt that the revelator believed that in the spirit-world there would be on the one hand distinct personalities and that on the other hand these persons would have an abiding place. The fact that, in vision, he sees the New Jerusalem coming from heaven to earth does not necessarily indicate that the earth will be the final abiding place of the spirits.

It is also said that God will be with his people and by virtue of his presence there will be no more sorrow nor physical infirmities nor death, but blessings freely given. These rare promises are for those alone who overcome; but, for those who are wicked and ungodly, the lake of fire and brimstone has its pangs.

Comforting
hopes.

“And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, laden with the seven last plagues; and he spoke with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal: having a wall great and high; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east were three gates; and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

A glowing
hope.

The measure
of the city.

And he that spake with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. And the building of the wall thereof was jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto pure glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

A beautiful
foundation.

A pleasant
place to be.

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof. And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there): and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it: and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh

an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and his servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign forever and ever" (21:9-22:5).

The river of life and the tree of life.

The contrast between this angel's message and the one that is recorded in 17:1ff could hardly be greater. There the angel in the most graphic language, shows how the harlot Rome, the enemy of God's people, together with all the associate forces of sin, even to Satan himself, are condemned; while here the angel can scarcely find language with which to express the glory of the New Jerusalem, the bride, the Lamb's wife.

A strong contrast.

The city is said to have high walls. In Oriental countries in ancient times, every city was supposed to have a wall for protection against enemies; hence the city here is a walled one, significant of safety and protection from every possible evil. The wall is said to have twelve foundations, on which there are the twelve names of the apostles (cf. v. 14). This indicates that the apostles were in a sense strong foundation material and that the future glory of many souls rested upon them (cf. Matt. 16:18;

The wall, significant of safety.

1 Cor. 2:10, 11; Eph. 2:20). The wall has twelve gates; named according to the twelve tribes of Israel, indicating that the old dispensation played a vital part in making an entrance into this city (cf. v. 12). At each one of these pearly portals an angel was standing with the glad welcome of heaven (cf. v. 12). The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with the rarest gems known to the revelator: twelve distinct gems for the twelve separate foundations. The gates are said to be open continually, for there is no possibility of evil entering (vs. 25-27). The city is a cube, a symbol of perfection, being equal in length, width, and height, measuring twelve thousand furlongs, or in other words, about fifteen hundred miles in each dimension. Each one of the twelve gates was a single pearl; and the streets are said to be transparent gold. Of course we must not be so grossly materialistic as to believe that this is a literal description of heaven. It is an idealistic picture of the rarest sort as an accommodation to our human needs. We might with much grace, write one great word over this entire page and that word would be GLORY. The river of life and the tree of life are brought over as types from Edenic bliss to add comfort and joy to the occasion; and God the Father and Christ the Lamb are present to make heaven what it is. It would be entirely impossible, if not puerile, to attempt to designate the exact detailed imagery of the description and it is probably enough for us to be thoroughly fascinated and completely overawed by the glittering glory of this wonderful scene.

Idealistic
glory.

CONCLUSION (22:6-21)

"And he said unto me, These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass. And behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book.

The message
thoroughly
dependable.

And I John am he that heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel that showed me these things. And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets and with them that keep the words of this book: worship God.

And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is.

The apocalypse
an open book.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolators, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie.

I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.

The great
invitation.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely.

The danger of
tampering with
this book.

I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

He who testifieth these things saith, Yea: I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen." (22:6-21).

A series of
testimonies.

This general conclusion of the book is largely a series of witnesses adding their testimony to the value of the material of the book and to the urgency of its application. It is still a part of the message of the angel who came to John with the description of the New Jerusalem. He comes with the divine acclaim; he is a messenger sent by God himself to say that these things must shortly come to pass, and that there is a blessing for those who keep the saying of the book: "**Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of the book**" (22:7). This promise of blessing is practically the same that appears in the very beginning of the book (cf. 1:3).

John bearing
testimony.

John the revelator then sets his seal of witness to the truth of this record. In addition to his testimony he also acknowledges that he attempted to worship the angel who brought him this message, just as he had attempted to do the former angel (cf. 19:10); but the angel assures him that he himself is but his fellow-servant in the ministry

of the gospel, and exhorts him to worship God. The only ground on which we could conceive of the revelator attempting to worship an angel would be either that he was bewildered or that he mistook the angel for the Lord.

In verses ten to twelve the angel commands John to write up the visions of the book because they have a timely message of the most vital interest for the world, a message which should therefore be an open book to all. In verses eleven and twelve there is an easy transfer from the angel ministry over to where Christ himself is speaking. He says, "**Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end**" (vs. 12, 13).

John again
commanded to
write what
he saw.

While the angel pronounces a blessing upon those who keep the words of this book (v. 7) Jesus tells us what that blessing is. He says, "**Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have a right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city.**" Those who have not that blessing find themselves in association with the offscouring of the world, as he further says (cf. v. 15).

Jesus now bears testimony and sets his seal to the truth by saying, "**I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star**" (v. 16). In the first verse of the book it is said of Jesus: "**And he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.**" On every page of the apocalypse from the first chapter to the last there is abundant evidence that the message is Christ's; and in every chapter in the book angel ministry is strongly in evidence: in fact, this is preëminently a book of angel ministry.

The witness
of Jesus.

The message
of the book a
living issue.

Immediately following this testimony he makes a strong appeal and gives an invitation to everyone to partake of the blessings of the gospel. He says, **"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely"** (v. 17). This beautiful invitation leaves no uncertain sound as to the vital import of the message of this book: it is a fountain of living water for every one who will come and partake of it. But on the other hand, he pronounces a very grave penalty upon him who tampers with it by adding to it or subtracting from it, and thus invalidating the glad tidings of the apocalypse. He adds impulse to the occasion by saying, **"I come quickly"** to which the revelator adds: **"Amen: come, Lord Jesus"** (v. 20). After which the revelator pronounces a benediction by saying, **"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen."**

A RETROSPECT

Having now completed a brief study of the book of Revelation it is well for us to take a review of the whole with the aim of seeing the general drift of the argument, and entering into a fuller appreciation of the spirit of its message. In this survey we will consider first the unity of the book.

A brief summary.

THE UNITY OF THE BOOK

The apocalypse is a unit from beginning to end: it is composed of five major divisions so linked together in a common chain of argument that it is impossible to separate them. The introduction (1:1-8), gives the source and authorship of the material, the purpose of its writing, a friendly greeting for the people to whom it was written, a brief benediction containing in a miniature the spirit of the book, and finally a seal of divine approval. This introduction is clearly a foreword or prologue to the book itself.

A valuable introduction.

The second general division (1:9-3:22), grows immediately out of the introduction and is a series of letters from Christ to the churches giving a warm appeal to every individual of these churches for a recognition of what it means to have an immanent Saviour. Under the burdens of daily life and especially under the throes of a martyr age, no truth could be more vital and essential than to know that the Saviour knows our utmost needs and is present and is abundantly able to meet them. While this truth finds its primary application to the people to whom it was written, it brings assurance of divine aid and comfort to every child of God for every age of the world. The Saviour that walks among the churches is the same Person who in our next section under an entirely different metaphorical representation, opens the

Letters of vital importance.

sealed book with its wonderful messages of comfort, assurance, and inspiration for the same people to whom the letters are addressed.

**Facts essential
to the occasion.**

The third general division (chapters 4-11), is a series of visions or seal-openings portraying matters of the most vital interest and importance to the churches under the conditions in which we have found them in the letters addressed to them. In fact, this division of the book lifts the curtain and gives God's people a view of heaven's plan, heaven's concern, and heaven's adequacy for earth's needs; and above all, it vindicates the righteousness of God in his dealings with mankind. The closing part of this general section gives the wicked a series of trumpet warnings, followed in the next division by a corresponding series of the bowls of the wrath of God, poured out upon those who will not accept the warning.

**The personnel
in the conflict.**

The fourth general subdivision of the book (chapters 12-22:5), adds to the preceding section the leading personnel of the great moral conflict under consideration in the former divisions, and brings the whole matter to an ultimate final conclusion. It is a portrayal of the great spiritual battlefield of that particular age and of all the ages following, and leads into the ultimate climax of all that is bad and of all that is good in this world.

The climax.

**The final
appeal.**

The conclusion, or fifth general subdivision (22:6-21), is as warm in the spirit of fellowship and personal appeal as the introduction, but adds to it the weight of the responsibility created by the message of the book. The personnel which entered into the opening verses of the book figures just as truly in the closing verses also, and places here the seals of approval, thus deepening the appealing power of the message.

THE GENERAL SPIRIT OF THE BOOK

The apocalypse is unequivocal in its dealing with sin; Sensitive to sin. but on the other hand, it is just as positive in its attitude toward righteousness. It denounces idolatry and immorality in unmistakable terms, even to the extent of condemning tolerance of those sins as they encroach upon the church. Every form of spiritual lethargy and coldness, manifested in hypocrisy, luxurious living, and carelessness is met with strong disapproval. The many expressions of judgment which appear under the various symbols throughout the book also strongly indicate its adverse attitude to sin.

Nowhere else in the entire Bible is there such a full and complete demonstration of the justice of God as we find portrayed a number of times in the book.¹ While, as we have just seen, the apocalypse unmistakably condemns sin in its various forms, it is, on the other hand, absolutely fair in its attitude to the sinner. The rare opportunities manifested in the seven letters, in the careful warnings, and large promises are a demonstration of this fact. The third seal has a strong appeal in this matter which is uniquely its own. The dark forewarnings of the wicked as indicated in the first half of the sixth seal in strong contrast to the protection and hope of those who are sealed render an appeal of no small moment. The seven trumpets manifested by the opening of the seventh seal seem to be a perfect vindication of the righteousness of God, such a vindication as is found nowhere else on record.² The numerous contrasts between the final abode and agony of the wicked and the final abode and joy of the righteous are a standing appeal to every man who has the power of choice, and that power finds its climax in the final appeal of the book: "And

A vindication
of the justice
of God.

the Spirit and the bride say, **Come.** And he that hear-eth, let him say, **Come.** And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely" (22:17).

Assurance and comfort for the saints.

One of the cardinal virtues of the apocalypse is the constant hope of the future held out to the saints, and the unmistakable assurance appearing on every page. Each one of the letters to the seven churches closes with a rich promise to every individual who proves faithful to the trust given him. The first seal has a mighty message of assurance for the victory of the gospel and the hope of the righteous. The sixth seal catches the echo of the first and wafts it on in behalf of those who make the sacrifice. The perfect immunity from the blasts of judgment that come upon the world, added to the hope of eternal glory as portrayed in the sixth seal, is a balm for all the ills of life. Every one of the many songs of triumph recorded in the book is a refrain of assurance and comfort that must have found a glad welcome in hearts burdened under the crucial pangs of the conflict. The glowing pictures of heaven appearing in the seventh chapter, and in the last two chapters of the book are the rarest hopes on record for the future life, hopes which ought to inspire every soul to a fuller consecration and to untiring energy in the service of God. This book calls forth a high standard of righteousness. It puts a premium on patience and earnest toil and faithfulness in the service of the Master. It expects a self-surrender, and a gradual growth into the highest ideals of moral integrity. It places before the faithful child of God an open door of opportunity into Christian service for the uplift of humanity to the glory of God and his kingdom. And on the contrary it puts a discount, yes, a genuine veto, upon

A high standard of moral integrity.

every mere pretense or sham of religion. It assures us that the victorious are they who are sealed with the impress of the Master's life.

"The apocalypse is preëminently a message of conflict in the religious or moral issues of life: it portrays the great battles between the forces of good and the forces of evil in which the ultimate victory is for righteousness. Almost every chapter in the book under the form of one symbol or another shows the marks of this Christian warfare. The assurance of victory both for the individual and for the church in the aggregate is vividly expressed in every song of triumph and in every picture of future glory."

A supreme
conflict between
the forces of
good and evil.

Victory for
the kingdom
of God.

"His loving teaching cannot fail;
And we shall know at last
Each task that seemed so hard and strange,
When learning time is past.
O! may we learn to love Him more,
By every opening page,
By every lesson He shall mark
With daily ripening age."

—*Havergal.*

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